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THE FETTERS OF FREEDOM

"I am no man's plaything!" burst out Gwenna, her fiery temper ablaze (*page* 192)

THE FETTERS OF FREEDOM

BY

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

AUTHOR OF

"The Island of Regeneration," "The Chalice of Courage," "The West Wind," etc.

With Illustrations by The Kinneys

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TO
THE IMMORTAL MEMORY
OF
The Greatest Man
OF ALL WHO HAVE BEEN BORN
OF MAN AND WOMAN

PREFACE

As everybody knows who is familiar with the making of my many books, but one out of the number I have written is without a preface. Like everybody addicted to the preface habit I have been accustomed to write the preface after everything else has been completed. This time I reverse the practice. Gentle reader, not one word of the story has as yet been put on paper! I am resolved to be honest in at least one book, and my preface shall be not only the thing that *goes* before, but the thing that *is* before; hence this beginning.

When a man creates a certain number of subjects in the kingdom of his imagination, when he endows them with temper and temperament, when they are imbued with personality, which manifests itself in character and is set forth in characteristics, and finally when he sets them upon the stage of his world of romance, he cannot always be quite sure where they will go, what they will do, what they will say, and what will happen to them. It is harder sometimes to control the child of the imagination than it is to direct the real boy or girl. I have had much experience with both kinds of children and I speak with authority! Yet it is an imprudent parent that does not lay some plans for his offspring in the beginning, therefore I have certain designs for my people, young and old.

Long, long study and heartfelt and boundless admiration have made me thoroughly familiar with Paulus,

the Roman citizen of Tarsus. I do not possess him, he possesses me. He will do what a man of his temper and temperament must do, which indeed he did. I am not quite so sure of Roman Attilius, the patrician pretorian, and I am even less sure of British Gwenna, a lady as I see her of somewhat uncertain temper and of great spirit, as might be expected from the glint of red in her golden hair.

I have pictured in my mind's eye these people on the sea, in the great Roman city, and on the sea again; Paulus on the ship, on the island of Malta, and in "his own hired house" convenient for that pretorian supervision to which he was subjected for two long, weary but useful years; I have seen Attilius also on the ship and in his magnificent palace on Aventine Hill; while Gwenna has appeared to me in the slave market, in the domus of Attilius, in the lodging of Paulus; and all these at the court of Nero and finally on the ship at last.

So much for the positive. For the negative, hereafter I promise you shall follow no extended description of Roman life or manners. That subject has been done and done so well of late in the works of Tucker, Dill, Friedländer, Fowler, and many others—to say nothing of the historians, satirists, and poets of Rome itself—that it does not seem worth while for me to try to do it over again. I have no desire to instruct anybody. I have no ambition to show what I know. Although I have read largely and studied long in these fields it is not my intention to try to emulate the meticulous Farrar in historical knowledge [1] or the fascinating Davis in

[1] "Darkness and Dawn."

minute and careful erudition [1] or the great Sienkiewicz in graphic and realistic description,[2] to say nothing of "Ben Hur," or "The Sign of the Cross," or all the other books of the kind. I pledge you my word, so far as a poor author can, that I intend to keep my people out of the Circus Maximus, for instance. It is not my plan to describe any revelry in the "Transitory House" of Nero. "*Christians to the lions!*" shall not be heard in my pages. I delineate no wild orgies, no vulgar and licentious revels of the Cæsar and his degenerate friends. Yet Nero and Tigellinus both have parts to play and both exercise their baleful influence over the fortunes of Attilius and Gwenna. Paulus will preach his gospel, and the religion of his Christ will be set forth in opposition to heathenism just as decisively, and the results will be seen just as clearly as if the sanded arena were wet with the blood of the slain.

So much by way of introduction. The preface goes to the printer to-day. Let us see whether I can keep to my text, as an author should as well as a preacher, in what follows, which finally I assure you is not sermon but story.

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY.

ST. GEORGE'S PARISH HOUSE,
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.
May, 1912.

[1] "A Friend of Cæsar."

[2] "Quo Vadis?"

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"I am no man's plaything!" burst out Gwenna, her fiery temper ablaze . . . (page 192) *Frontispiece*

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Book I

IN THE SEA OF ADRIA

CHAPTER I

THE EMPEROR'S TREASURE

THERE was no doubt that Caius Attilius, the young military tribune, was a very ill man,—perhaps had been would be the better tense of the verb, for it appeared to his officers and to the shipmaster, men of long and varied experience of a rough-and-ready sort, although none of them was a professional physician, that the crisis of the disease had passed and that the grip of the fever had been broken.

Regulus, the primipilus, or first centurion of the legion, with two of his brother captains, stood over their tribune where he lay asleep in the after cabin, and thoughtfully and compassionately noted the ravages of the fever. They were not much given to pity, these Romans, but the old veteran was deeply attached to the young patrician. He and the tribune had been associated a long time in the Fourteenth Legion and in many of the hard-fought battles with the wild Ethiopians and Abyssinians of the southern Egyptian frontier they had stood side by side. Indeed, Regulus had taught the youth the art of war, and this veteran centurion was by no means an indifferent teacher. There was no more renowned soldier of his rank in Cæsar's thirty-odd legions. He laid his horny, knotted hand lightly on the brow of the sleeper and discovered with satisfaction that the burning heat of the African

fever, which had gripped him so long and so fiercel
and because of which he had been invalided home, ha
at last left him. The forehead of the patient was eve
cool.

It was late in the season, verging upon winter indeed
and Regulus, after a moment's pause, drew a light cov
ering of wool over the linen sheet which was thrown
over the young man. Caius Attilius, a patrician and
of senatorial rank, owned an immense number of slaves
who, after the custom of Rome, were always ready and
available for every conceivable bodily service, but the
ship was already overloaded and the few slaves who
had attended him in the army had been left behind to
take passage on other ships later. The soldiers of the
legion, who were fellow-passengers with the tribune, had
vied with each other in loving service to their officer,
for there was no more popular man in the legion, and
indeed in the army of Egypt, than Caius Attilius.
These veterans, who were going home with their dis-
charge papers after many years of honourable service,
jealously compassed their young leader with sweet ob-
servances cheerfully rendered by themselves.

There was something grotesque, yet infinitely touch-
ing in the attempts they made to be gentle, to be tender.
It was a great tribute to the character and personality
of Caius Attilius, and it would have pleased him greatly
if he had perceived it. He had known nothing about
it, of course; he had been too ill.

He had been stricken in the far south with the
dreaded African, or jungle, fever and had lost conscious-
ness early in the hasty voyage down the ancient river

Nile. He knew nothing of the efforts made by the skilled leeches and physicians of Alexandria to effect his cure. He did not know that the prætor, the Emperor's legate, who governed the province, had at last determined that his only chance would be at home in Rome. The Greek-Alexandrian physicians had concurred in this view and had also pointed out that the sea voyage might do him good. Hence his position that morning in the after cabin of the *Isis*.

The hopes of the Emperor's legate and the prognostications of the clever Egyptian practitioners had been abundantly justified. Although scarcely a week had elapsed since the great Pharos at the mouth of the harbour had sunk beneath the horizon, the fever was already broken, Caius Attilius was in the first sound sleep he had enjoyed for many days, and all was well. If no setback occurred his recovery was assured. In the mind of Regulus and the other centurions of the legion, the voyage was a success.

The *Isis* was one of the largest and best equipped of the huge imperial freight and passenger boats which plied between Alexandria and Italy. The navigation season for the year was practically over, but in an emergency ships did not hesitate to venture upon the passage at any time. Not only was the *Isis* carrying Caius Attilius, the young tribune and friend of Cæsar, but in place of her usual lading of corn she was also transporting a huge cargo of the richest, rarest, and most costly products of Egypt, destined for the imperial treasury. Included in her lading was a report from the quæstor of the province accompanying a vast

treasure of gold and silver—the yearly tribute—and a small parcel of jewels of great price designed for the personal use of the Emperor and the Augusta, his wife.

In addition to the ordinary crew of the ship there were on board some two hundred men of the Fourteenth Legion with the primipilus and two other veteran centurions, whose time of service had expired, who had reached the age of retirement, and were returning to Italy to receive such rewards as were usually heaped upon veteran soldiers. They had not been established in one of the colonies of the Emperor with grants of land because the Fourteenth Legion had been raised and constantly recruited in Italy itself; these men were Romans and would live nowhere but in the City of the Seven Hills. Caius Attilius was, of course, theoretically in command of them, but in his disability the charge had devolved upon Regulus.

The voyage had been a rather tempestuous one. The *Isis* had become severely strained in a series of half gales which she had encountered. She had been forced by the storm to run into Fair Havens, a harbour near Lasea on the south side of the island of Crete. Upon their arrival there if another ship had offered Regulus would have taken the liberty of trans-shipping the cargo because of the leaky condition of the *Isis*, but there was no ship available in the harbour save another huge, lumbering trader, the *Osiris*, also of Alexandria, which had just arrived from Myra on the coast of Asia Minor, and which, in addition to an immense cargo of wheat, was carrying a large number of prisoners of various sorts from Syria to Rome for trial. These she had

picked up from a coaster at Myra, a Lycian port to which the *Osiris* had been driven by heavy weather. This ship was not in much better condition than the *Isis*, Regulus found after consulting with the centurion who had it in charge, an old friend of his, whose name was Julius.

It was important that the cargo of the *Isis* should reach Rome, that the jewels should be delivered, and that young Caius Attilius should be landed as soon as possible; therefore Regulus, although the *Isis* was in a measure unseaworthy, determined to proceed in her, rather than winter at Crete. Before he left the harbour, which was scarcely more than an open roadstead by the way, he caused the treasure and some of the least bulky and most precious merchandise to be landed at Crete and turned over to the proconsular officers in Lasea, to be held for a safer ship and a more favourable time for transportation to Rome. This was done secretly and at night because the virtue of the inhabitants of Crete was not above suspicion and the storing of so great a treasure in the city might have excited the cupidity of the islanders and made it a matter of some difficulty for the scanty garrison to protect it.

Regulus was in some doubt as to the landing of the jewels, but concluded, since they were not of great bulk, that he could put them in a bag and attach it to his person, where they would be safe enough in case of accident. He had faced and had surmounted every conceivable danger that could menace a soldier during his long life, and he had an auspicious confidence in his

own good fortune. If the ship sank he at least would be saved.

When all had been done in accordance with his views, the *Isis* weighed anchor and spread sail before a strong but favourable breeze that blew from the eastward, leaving the *Osiris*, the sister ship, about ready to weigh and follow. Two days after her departure she had, in the opinion of Agacles, the old shipmaster, gained sufficient westing to enable him to lay his course to the northward through the Sea of Adria to the port of Brundisium, which, as it was nearer than Puteoli on the west coast, the port the ship usually made, seemed the more desirable haven under the circumstances. The wind, shifting to the southward, was still fair for the run northward, and although it was increasing in force, Agacles concluded that the ship would bear her canvas, except the little topsail which was often hoisted above the great mainsail upon the single mast amidships. The smaller sail being furled and the upper yard struck, the *Isis* plunged through the rolling seas under the grey sky on her final run of perhaps four hundred miles toward safety and the haven.

It was noticed that the leak which had threatened ere they reached Crete had become actual after they passed Clauda, and that the ship was taking in water at a continually increasing rate. Efforts to get at the leak had proved futile, but the water was not coming in fast enough to give them any great amount of uneasiness at present. Later it might become necessary to resort to pumps and buckets to get rid of the water, but there was no great need for anxiety yet.

In fact the thought of the leak was lost in a more obvious and threatening danger which had developed that morning. It was to consult about that danger that Regulus and the others were summoned from the cabin of Attilius to the deck of the ship by one of the seamen, there to confer with the shipmaster. Since the tribune slept so soundly, Regulus concluded that to send watchers into the cabin would but disturb him. Indeed, since no harm could possibly come to him he would best be left alone. He carefully closed the door behind him and went out on deck with the other two.

The sleep of Attilius was indeed calm and peaceful. A long time he lay still in the comparative quiet of the cabin; his ears had long since become accustomed to the creaking and groaning of the timbers, as well as his body to the rolling and pitching of the huge, unwieldly, heavily loaded ship. Presently, however, his eyes unclosed and he stared uncertainly and uncomprehendingly about him. When the fever had left him the night before and ere he slept again, he had asked questions enough to put himself in possession of most of the facts of the situation. He knew at last that he had been stricken in the desert, that he had been brought down the Nile and placed on the ship at Alexandria, and was now homeward bound, but his mind was naturally not yet clear and alert, and it took him some time on his awaking to reconstruct the story that had been told him and to appreciate the situation once more.

From the berth in which he lay, which was built across the cabin, athwartships that is, he had a plain

view of the sea for a long distance through the windows of the after cabin, which overhung the stern. As he lay idly staring a triple-banked ship, swiftly propelled by oars, suddenly flashed across his vision, although she was yet a long way off. Her purple mainsail was set, and under the impetus of wood and canvas she was going at a great pace. The sight was sufficiently unusual and remarkable to have aroused the closer attention of Attilius in an instant had he been in his normal condition. As it was he only speculated with an idle, weak curiosity as to what the ship might be and what she might be doing there and what was the impelling motive for the furious haste with which she was driving through the seas. The problem was too great for his weakened condition, and though for a while he feebly pondered it, he finally dismissed it as the strange trireme drew out of his range of vision.

His eyes wandered around the cabin, which was bare of furniture save for a table, chair, and his sleeping berth, until they fell upon his armour piled up upon a transom. From a hook above it and near where he lay hung his short Roman sword. Two or three pila, or short Roman spears, leaned in the same corner.

Attilius was a soldier who loved his profession. His eyes lighted a little and a faint colour came into his pale cheeks as his glance lingered on these military trappings. By stretching out his hand he found he could touch his sword. He languidly made the motion, and his fingers caressed with satisfaction the chased scabbard which contained the short blade. That weapon had served him well in many a campaign. Little flashes

of reminiscence came over him, in the midst of which he presently fell contentedly asleep again.

Out on the deck Regulus and Agacles with the other centurions had at once engaged in an interested debate. The same ship which Attilius saw later was visible to them on the eastern horizon. A short distance from it they also saw a sister ship, and the two were making straight for the *Isis*.

Now Pompeius with his great fleet many years before had cleared the Mediterranean of the numerous squadrons of pirate ships which had made navigation so hazardous. The subsequent Cæsars had maintained a navy for the sole purpose of keeping down these ferocious and pestilent marauders, and piracy, once an easy and not very hazardous method of making a living, had become a most dangerous trade. When they were captured and convicted the punishment that was visited upon pirates was of the severest description—crucifixion. It was nevertheless impossible to stamp out piracy completely, and ever and anon some ship sailed away from some harbour and failed to reach its destination. Sometimes its fate was due to the storms and perils of the sea, sometimes, if there had been a survivor, tales of rapine, bloodshed, frightful outrage, and murder could have been told.

Certain pirates of Cilicia had heard at Tarsus of the projected despatch of the treasure ship from Alexandria. They had stationed themselves off the north coast of Crete expecting, when the time of their calculations had arrived, to fall on the ship in the Sea of Adria. Fortune had favoured them, for when the *Isis*

had put into Fair Havens some of their crew were in the city of Lasca. The pirate ships had touched on the north coast for water and provisions, and these men strayed over to Lasca, where they had remained until the *Isis* sailed. Then they had made haste to re-cross the island and give the news to their commander. The men of these galleys were expert at their trade and knew all the tricks thereof; they were seamen of the first quality, too, and they were thus able to locate the *Isis* with almost wizardlike accuracy. Three days from Fair Havens they saw her, hull-down before them, on the western horizon. They made all speed to close with her.

The pirate galleys were of different build from the bluff-bowed merchant ship, whose best speed under sail was perhaps five knots an hour. These plundering triremes could make that speed under sail without difficulty, and when the triple-banked oars were used they could go half again as fast. The oarsmen were usually galley-slaves, but in the case of these two pirate ships the men of the band themselves did the rowing until the ships closed with their quarry; after which, abandoning their oars, each seized his weapons and became a fighting man. The triremes of the pirates were, compared to the *Isis*, of smaller size, and if the oarsmen had been slaves they could not have carried enough fighting men to have overcome their prey in case of much resistance.

Two hundred and fifty fighting men could be crowded into a galley in this way. Although they lacked drill, discipline, and organisation, they had courage, ferocity,

ruthless brutality, and long experience in battle, and they were consequently a formidable body of men. They were recruited from all the nations that bordered the Mediterranean, including many Greeks, some renegade Italians, men of Little Asia and of the Orient, some from Syria, and even a few masterless and outcast Jews.

Their plans were quite simple. They would run the *Isis* aboard, one to the starboard and one to the port, fling a mass of men upon her decks, master the ship, murder the crew and passengers, relieve her of such of her cargo as was of value to them, scuttle or burn her, and go on their way rejoicing.

Their information, however, was faulty in several particulars. They had not learned, for instance, that the more precious part of her lading, the gold and the silver, had been landed at Crete; neither had they been informed that the *Isis* carried a detachment of Roman soldiers. These had been embarked at the last minute with Attilius, after the informant of the rovers had sailed away from Alexandria to meet them at Paphos in Cyprus. They would not have raced down upon the great merchantman with such confidence and zeal had they known of the legionaries aboard her.

"Worthy centurion," began the shipmaster, "what thinkest thou of those ships yonder?"

Regulus turned his head and shaded his brows the better to see. Glasses, or telescopes, were of course unknown in those days, but the eye of the Roman was trained to take in much more than the unaided vision would be apt to discover to-day.

"If I know anything about them, they are ships of war, Master Agacles," answered the chief centurion after a long look.

"Aye, but not imperial galleys despite their purple canvas."

"It doth not seem so to me," added Regulus.

"What thinkest thou of them, under-pilot?" continued Agacles, turning to the steersman.

The pilot who stood aft by the huge oar thrust out of its port, attending to the steerage of the ship, turned and surveyed the two ships drawing rapidly nearer.

"Pirates, by Neptune!" he cried, "if I know the breed."

Regulus nodded.

"Salvus," he said to a brother centurion who stood with the little group, "send Balbo to me at once."

The centurion saluted, turned, and the call for Balbo went echoing through the ship. In a moment a bronzed, weather-beaten, bowlegged legionary came rolling aft.

"Balbo, thou hast been a sailor on Cæsar's ships, a pilot, if I mistake not——"

"Aye, sir," was the answer, "that I have."

"Good. What thinkest thou of yonder pair?"

Balbo stepped to the extreme after part of the ship, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared.

"Ships of war," he muttered, "but not those of Cæsar, whom the gods preserve. Cilicians, I take it, worthy centurion," he added, turning. "To thee, Master Agacles, my advice is, do thou put the ship

in position of defence without delay. These be sea wolves who have somehow escaped the Emperor's fleet, and will be upon us"—he looked over the side and then aft again, appearing to calculate in his mind the rate of sailing—"within an hour."

"The advice is good," interposed Regulus. He looked at the shipmaster. "What dost thou propose?" he asked.

"My business is to sail the ship," said Agacles, "and thine to defend her."

"And couldst thou sail away from them?"

"By no means. There is presage of storm in the air." He turned his head up in the direction of the wind and sniffed the breeze. "The wind is scarcely as strong as it was when day dawned, and oftentimes there is a previous calm for an hour or two before the storm breaks upon us. Is that not thine experience, chief-pilot?"

"My judgment agrees with thine," said Ramses, an Egyptian who occupied that important position on the ship and who had just come aft from his cabin where he had been off watch.

"If the wind fall," said Regulus thoughtfully, "have we not oars——"

"A few," answered Agacles, "but if we took the men to man them we should be more helpless than we are and our speed would be as nothing in respect to theirs."

"Then we must meet their attack. Salvus!"

"Sir."

"Take thou seventy-five of the men of the legion and

occupy the fore part of the ship. I, with Pætus, will command the aft part with seventy-five more. As to the remainder——"

"Give me leave, most noble centurion," interrupted Agacles, "I am not a fighting man, but the ship is mine and all my fortune is embarked in her. May not I, too, be of service under thy direction? I have wielded the sword and lance in Thrace and Bithynia——"

"Good. Thou and thy men shall keep the waist with Balbo and the remaining legionaries to assist thee."

"And how about the tribune?" interposed Pætus, the third centurion.

"We will leave the noble Attilius to his needed rest, I think," continued Regulus, looking upon the men who crowded the decks and who had heard all. "I and my brave comrades of the Fourteenth Legion can hold the ship without disturbing a sick man who can scarcely raise his head."

"We will protect the noble Attilius and the ship with our lives," burst from the men.

"Good," said Regulus. "Now put on your armour, lay aside your baggage, and repair to your stations. Conceal yourselves in the fore cabin or by lying on the floor of the deck close under the bulwarks. Let no light upon a spear point or gleam upon a helmet betray us. And do thou, Master Agacles, keep thine even course and we shall see how yonder pirates will like the welcome prepared for them by the men of the Thundering Legion."

So the Fourteenth Legion was named, its device being

a thunderbolt, or lightning flash, darting through a mass of clouds. Great Jupiter himself was its patron deity.

There ensued a few moments of hasty yet orderly preparation while the men buckled on their armour, donned their helmets, slung their short swords over their shoulders, slipped their left arms through their shield-holds, and looked to the heavy spears and javelins which formed part of their war gear. As fast as they were equipped they were mustered, divided into three groups of seventy-five under Salvus, seventy-five under Pætus, and the remainder under old Balbo. The group forward concealed itself in the forecastle, or seamen's cabin, those amidships lay down upon the deck behind the low bulwarks, those aft filled the after castle, every space, indeed, except the cabin in which the sleeping tribune lay. And it was amusing to note how softly and with what little jingling of armour the rude legionaries moved into the greater outer cabin so as not to disturb the life-giving, refreshing sleep of their young leader. The sailors and men of the ship, mainly from Alexandria, armed themselves with bows, slings, spears, swords, and shields, and made ready to contribute what they could to the defence.

Regulus, Agacles, the shipmaster, and Ramses the chief-pilot aft, with a few of the seamen forward, such as might naturally be visible on such a ship under such circumstances, were alone to be seen on the decks as the *Isis* drove slowly on before the failing breeze.

It was evident to the more experienced of those she

carried that the attack of man would soon be succeeded by a furious tempest which was piling terrible and ominous black clouds upon the eastern horizon. But they could pay no attention to the threat of the storm then.

CHAPTER II

THE SHREWD BLOW OF THE TRIBUNE

The second sleep of Caius Attilius differed from his previous slumber; it was no longer untroubled. Perhaps the excitement upon the decks was communicated in some way to the consciousness of the sleeping man. His rest was broken by dreams and visions. He lay, after a long time, in a condition between sleeping and waking, half conscious of the unwonted trampling of feet upon the decks and the orders and commands which, though carefully subdued, came to him imperfectly. He heard the faint clink of steel on steel as the legionaries jostled each other in the rolling ship. The wind came less fiercely into the cabin, the movement of the ship was still great, but she seemed to rise and fall inertly.

He vaguely suspected he knew not what, but something gave him a sense of peril. Finally he threw aside the woolen coverlet, and raised himself on his elbow. There was a feeling of suspense in the atmosphere. He was sure of it. He opened his mouth to call when a chorus of sudden shouts in Greek and fierce yells in mongrel dialects broke upon his ear. The shouts he knew, the yells were strange. The noise came first from the right hand and then from the left; the tumult of sound did not arise from the decks of the *Isis*, either. He listened with senses keenly on the alert in spite of

his weakness, wondering for a moment what this wild medley of clamorous, various voices might portend. The solution of the mystery at the instant did not appear to him.

The next moment there was a terrific, crashing, rending sound. The *Isis* shivered, stopped, and then reeled from some tremendous impact. So violent was her recoil from the blow that Caius Attilius was thrown over backward against the bulkhead across which his berth was placed. The shock of his fall was severe for one in his condition, although had he been reasonably well, he would not have minded it for a second. He fought valiantly against a sudden faintness which bade fair to overcome him.

The recovery of the ship, her languid return to an even keel, was not rapid. Whatever had struck her seemed to be pressing her down, but before Caius Attilius could reason it out a similar crashing impact upon the other side drove the ship suddenly backward, almost upon her beam ends, in the other direction. As he lay helpless upon his berth under these shocks, his hand reached out toward the table and clasped a flat-bottomed flask just as it was about to capsize. He knew what was in that flask; wine, strong, such as sailors love and the ship afforded.

If ever he needed strength and stimulant he needed it now. His first thought had been that the ship had struck a rock or a submerged hulk, but the second shock had enlightened him. In a flash he remembered the rowing galley which a few moments—or was it a few hours?—before had flashed athwart his dull vision as

he stared out of the broad stern port. He realised that the *Isis* had been rammed first on one side and then on the other by two ships. He was too experienced a soldier not to recognise the noise of conflict, for now the whole air above him was filled with ringing sounds—shouts, yells, oaths, curses, in every language of the Mediterranean littoral, the ringing of the swords, the clashing of shield on shield, the scream of agony in many languages, the twang of bows, the crashing of slingstones upon battered armour, the grinding of the ships side by side, rolling against one another in a seaway, and above all the deep-toned shouts of the Roman soldiers!

His legion and the ship were attacked. The treasure of the Emperor was menaced. The decks of the *Isis* were being wet with blood, gory streams were even now pouring out of her scuppers, and he was not there! He could distinguish the voices of Regulus and Salvus and Pætus, the hoarse shouts of Balbo, and the full, musical war-cry of Greek Agacles. They were fighting for their lives, for their honour, for the treasure of the Emperor, for him—and he was not there! He could not endure the position. It was not to be borne patiently by a man, a soldier, and a Roman.

All that put life into his wasted limbs. He drew the flask toward him and drank, took a breath, and drank again. War, and he, Caius Attilius, tribune of the Thundering Legion, was not there!

He could not tell how the battle was going. The struggle was evidently fierce and hand-to-hand, and there was no abatement. Each side appeared to be

meeting stronger resistance than had been anticipated. Regulus and the soldiers and the crew of Alexandrians were fighting for liberty, honour, and the Emperor. The pirates were fighting for their lives, fighting with a vision of a cross and long, lingering hours of fearful torture before them.

After they had swarmed over the high bulwarks upon the apparently deserted deck, with shouts of triumph, only to find themselves confronted on every hand by ranks of legionaries, the fiercest fighting soldiers in the world, they would have retreated to their ships; but Agacles, with Greek cunning, had fastened grapnels by ropes and chains to the arms of the great yard. The two ships had struck the *Isis* fairly amidships. The Greek, warning all clear, had cut the halyards, and the far extending yard had fallen across the decks of the two ships, and the pirate galleys were thus fast bound to the quarry upon which they had flung themselves. Unable to escape, it was to be a battle to the death, therefore. Indeed, each man fought as if his back were against a wall. Nothing, apparently, could withstand the legionaries; yet nothing, it seemed, could sustain the fierce onslaught of the overwhelming numbers of ruthless sea wolves. So back and forth across the broad decks amidships the battle surged and raged, while Caius Attilius listened and prayed on his narrow bed in his cabin.

The first rush from the port ship had driven Balbo and his men aft to where Regulus and his detachment were stationed. The pirates filled the waist, or centre, of the ship. Another torrent of men from the starboard

vessel had hurried forward, where they hurled themselves upon Salvus and his band. Thus two separate battles raged on the *Isis*.

The pirate chieftain, however, still had a string to his bow. He had not anticipated any such resistance. Had he dreamed of it for a moment, in spite of the tremendous booty to be gained, he would have let the *Isis* severely alone, but being in the quarrel he bore himself with a courage and skill worthy of a better cause and a better man.

Astern of one of the galleys a pinnace, or small boat, was towed. From his position on the starboard rail he saw that his only chance of ultimate success would lie in attacking the rear of one or the other groups of legionaries forward or aft. He called to him a gigantic Nubian, upon whom he depended for close desperate work, and bade him return to the galley, gather up what men he could of those who had been left upon the ship, drop into the pinnace, row around to the stern of the *Isis*, climb aboard through the cabin windows, and take Regulus and his men in the rear. Catching the legionaries between the two files of Cilicians he hoped to win the after part of the ship, after which the rest would be easy.

The movement of the Nubian was not observed, or if it were noticed, no attention was paid to it. The battle raging was of the fiercest description. The Roman soldiers in all their campaigning, extending over a score of years on many a hard-fought field, had never experienced anything like it. The pressure upon them was tremendous, they were outnumbered nearly three

to one, and had the field of operation not been limited to the narrow deck so that the enemy could not use their numbers to the best advantage, they had been annihilated. As it was, they stood in close-locked ranks, shields advanced, stubbornly at bay. Those in the front cut viciously with their short, sharp Roman swords, those in the rear thrust violently with their terrible Roman spears. Most of the sailors had been cut down, but a few bowmen still stood on the high poop of the ship overlooking the battle and shot their remaining arrows into the mass of the enemy. With longer lances, with longer swords, with axes, with stones, the latter sought to break the ordered ranks of the Romans. The two battles had crowded so at each end of the vessel that a broad space, tenanted only by dead bodies, stretched amidships between them.

Caius Attilius in the cabin below drank again. He prayed to the gods, as he had never prayed before for anything else, for strength to enter the fight. He could hear the roar of the battle undiminished. Evidently his men were hard put to it. Ordinarily such a contest would have been decided long since by the disciplined valour and steady courage of the legionaries. Its continuance was evidence to him of the fierceness of the struggle and of the jeopardy his soldiers must be in.

He raised himself to his elbow and then struggled to a sitting position; his feet dropped to the deck. He knew that he could not put on his armour, that he could not carry a shield, but at least his appearance might hearten his men. He reached his hand out—the distance was short, and by leaning forward he could

make it—and grasped the hilt of his short sword and drew it slowly toward him. He took another draught of the energising wine. He knew the cumulative effect of small doses taken at frequent intervals. He was no deep drinker, consequently the wine helped him. Finally by a great effort he rose unsteadily to his feet. He clutched the stanchion which upheld the ceiling of the cabin to support himself.

After waiting a moment he slowly turned to the door, but as he did so the light of the cabin was suddenly obscured. He faced about again to see great gnarled and knotted black hands clutching the port sill. A moment and a jet-black, thick-lipped Nubian face rose in view. The newcomer wore a red cloth bound around his brow. A broadsword was held between white teeth. Other hands of lighter hue clutched at the sill on either side also. Other faces appeared in the broad opening. Caius Attilius stared as if in a dream. He cursed his weakness, realising on the instant that this was an attack on the rear which, if it succeeded, would mean the loss of the ship. Could he stop it?

He released his hold on the stanchion. Silently—he had no strength to waste in cries—he staggered across the cabin toward the stern window. The Nubian saw him coming, ghastly pale as the linen cloth wrapped about his loins, thin as death itself from the ravages of the fever. A light shone on the short sword that trembled in his feeble hand. The Nubian paused in amazement a moment, half in half out of the window, his knee on the sill. This seemed like a figure of death

itself to him. His blood ran a little cold about his heart. The next moment Caius Attilius lurched aft and thrust with the last vestige of strength in his arm.

Fortune guided his hand. If he had been in health and strength, it had been easy, but now to the gods alone he admitted success was due, for the sharp point of the sword touched the throat of the fierce marauder. There was not enough strength in the thrust to have driven home the blade, but Caius Attilius fell forward in sheer weakness, and his own weight was added to the impetus of the blow. The Nubian, taken at such disadvantage, could do nothing. He dropped his own sword which he had seized with his left hand, threw up his arms, and fell backward. As he went hurtling down, his extended arms struck the other figures clinging to the sill and endeavouring to draw themselves up, for they had no ladder. These, too, were swept down with him. His huge body, dead, inert, fell heavily into the pinnace, knocked two men overboard, crushed a third, and almost overturned the boat, which drifted clear of the ship.

The attack was foiled for the moment. If they came again, however, it would inevitably succeed, for Caius Attilius was spent. One of the figures at the stern window had thrust at him with a spear before he fell and torn a long, red gash in the Roman's side. It needed not that, however, for the fictitious strength lent by the wine and by the desperate determination of the tribune had disappeared. Caius Attilius lay in a senseless heap on the cabin floor, incapable of anything further. Whether a second attempt would have

been made upon the ship was not to be determined, for at that very instant there broke over the sea and the ships and the fighting men the brewing storm.

In such a conflict of steadiness and endurance, discipline must always be served in the end. Waiting in vain for that attack in the rear by his Nubian coadjutor, which he expected would turn the scales in his favour, the robber leader had begun to lose heart. As it was with the leader, so it was with the men. The legionaries had been on the defensive heretofore, but with that peculiar intuition of the successful soldier, Regulus divined that the crisis of the battle had arrived and that he would triumph who first seized the psychological moment for an advance. He had contented himself hitherto with defence, realising that upon him and his the safety of the ship depended; but now was the moment to throw defence to the winds.

Opening a way for himself through the ranks of his legionaries, he drove a heavy pilum into the breast of the man opposite him, and then with a great surge he fairly leaped against the stubborn ranks, uttering his battle-cry as he did so. The sight of their primipilus in the advance inspired the legionaries with new courage, filled them with something of his own splendid hardihood. With an irresistible impetus they too moved forward.

On the other flank Balbo, who had possessed himself of a gnarled and knotted war-club, dropped his shield, disdaining its protection, and leaped upon the foe with uplifted arms, and although a dozen spears were buried in his breast, he brought down his heavy weapon, sweep-

ing all before him as he fell. He immediately opened a way into which Paetus sprang. The next instant the close-locked ranks of the pirates disintegrated into units. Through them the Roman soldiers sifted, cutting and stabbing.

As the men aft gave way, so the men forward, after one brave, desperate effort, did the like, and the vacant space amidships was suddenly crowded with flying, panic-stricken figures frantically seeking salvation upon their own ships. The bulwarks on either side were instantly black with men scrambling over and leaping down on their own decks. Some sought to raise the halyards, others strove to man the oars, while cooler hands cut and hacked frantically at the grapnels of rope and chain.

The fighting blood of the Romans was up, however; they thought they saw a chance at capture. The two galleys, if they could be seized and brought into port, would be rare and valuable prizes; they might have much booty aboard. Without orders, therefore, they swarmed across the bulwarks to starboard and to port, and the interrupted battle was at once resumed upon the decks of the galleys.

Agacles was down, a spear through his heart. Ramses, the chief-pilot, had had his brains beaten out by a war-club. Balbo, the sailor legionary, was dead from a dozen wounds. Most of the crew also were killed.

In the wild excitement of the conflict none thought to look toward sky or sea. Mad with the lust of the battle, none realised the coming of the storm until it

broke upon them. With a crash of terrific thunder the tempest was heralded. The wind had died away and, save for the rolling of an uneasy sea, the battle had been fought in a perfect calm. In the twinkling of an eye, with a roar which made even the thunderbolt insignificant, the tornado burst upon them. The sea was beaten into a white froth on the instant. The three ships were wrenched apart. Two of them, having their sails partly spread, were driven ahead, the grapnels and lashings snapped like threads. A horrible mist and darkness fell over the waters. With men still fighting for mastery on her decks one of the galleys disappeared in the sudden obscurity on one side, the other on the other.

There were left upon the *Isis* Regulus and a half-dozen veterans whom he had gathered about him as a reserve so as to be ready for any emergency. There were perhaps half as many seamen unwounded. A score of the legionaries had been killed, and practically all of the unarmed sailors, and there must have been fifty of the pirates, dead and severely wounded, lying upon the decks. The remainder of the legionaries were upon the two boats which had disappeared in the storm. Among the sailors left there were none of skill, experience, or importance. The cutting of the halyards deprived Regulus of the ability to set any sail, yet the *Isis*, under the terrific pressure of the wind, forged swiftly ahead, turning as she did so until she lay broadside in the trough of the sea. At first, the wind had flattened the water, but the waves were beginning to rise and the *Isis* was soon rolling terribly.

Regulus did not know what to do. Indeed it would have taxed the skill of old Agacles, who had made so good a fight for his ship, to have remedied affairs. The primipilus looked over the side and thought that the ship was considerably lower in the water. He went forward and saw that the timbers had been strained on either side where the galleys had crashed into the *Isis*. If they had been provided with iron beaks they would have cut her down, but even the blunt impact had proven sufficiently damaging. Seams had opened, butts had started. He sent below a seaman who reported that the *Isis* was filling with water and would soon sink. The small boat of the merchant ship which had been towed along one side had been crushed as one of the galleys had struck her.

Bidding the crew make what preparations seemed best to them for their own salvation Regulus, with a heavy heart, turned and went into the after cabin. He was amazed beyond measure to find the tribune huddled in a heap near the after window with a spear wound in his side, and yet he instantly divined what probably had happened. He lifted the senseless young patrician up in his arms as if he had been a baby and laid him upon his berth. With skilful hands he bound up the wound with the linen of the bed. Indeed, it was merely a flesh wound and dangerous only because of the weakened condition of the tribune. He bathed his face and forced some of the wine between his lips, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing his beloved young commander open his eyes.

"What hath happened?" whispered Attilius.

"We were beset by two pirate galleys of Cilicia. They boarded us on either side and the fight upon the decks was close and bloody. Never saw I the like of it in my forty years of service."

"But we beat them?"

"Aye, the legionaries boarded the ships on either side——"

"I remember," said Attilius; "they sought entrance through this cabin. I drove my sword through the throat of a great Nubian——"

"By Hercules!" burst out Regulus, picking up as he did so the blood-stained sword of the tribune. "The gods gave thee strength in thy weakened arm."

"It must have been so."

"And thou didst save the battle, for had they burst upon us and taken us in the rear through the cabin, we had been lost."

"What is to do now?" began Attilius in the little pause that followed the centurion's words.

"But little, I fear me. The storm hath broken upon the ship. The galleys have been wrenched away. With our men still fighting the pirates upon their decks they have disappeared in the mist and spray. We are alone and helpless and scarcely a seaman or a legionary remaineth aboard."

"But Agacles?"

"Dead."

"Ramses?"

"Dead."

"Balbo?"

"Dead all. The ship hath fallen in the trough of

the sea. The leak is gaining, butts and seams have opened——"

"And we must die," said Attilius. "Well, the gods know that it was a good fight. Would that I had found strength to do more. Help me to my feet, worthy friend and tutor in war and honour and glory for these many years. I may not bear armour, but at least wrap my toga about me and give me my sword. A Roman should die upon his feet, his sword in hand. And do thou help me out upon the deck that we may not be drowned like rats in a trap. It is well that we are together. I could wish no better companion than thou, brave Regulus, in the long descent to Avernus or what lieth beyond."

"I thank thee, Caius Attilius," answered the old soldier, his eyes gleaming. "When I was a boy I followed the great proconsul, thy father, and I am honoured with the affection of his worthy and beloved son."

Supported by the arm of Regulus, Attilius presently stepped upon deck. The water was gaining rapidly. The decks of the *Isis* were almost awash. Forward the survivors were busy making a raft. With the ready skill of the Roman soldier they had cut the yard in two, water casks had been lashed between the two pieces, planks ripped from the deck had been laid across, and aided by the sailors, who had wit enough for that, a serviceable raft had been prepared.

The wash of the sea had taken overboard most of the bodies of the slain and most of the wounded as well. There was no time for the care of the wounded,

and had there been time there was little pity in the hearts of the survivors; so dead and wounded alike were left to themselves. Indeed, the severely wounded and helpless among the Romans had stoically refused succour, knowing that their fate was sealed in any event and that the endeavour to do anything for them would only jeopard the chance, slim enough at best, of the survivors.

They brought the tribune forward, the raft was launched to leeward, the survivors boarded it, the lashings were cut, and it drove away in the storm. The slight support of the rude mass of timbers had been gained just in time, for they presently saw the *Isis* lift her stern high in the air and plunge bow foremost beneath the raging sea. Regulus knelt upon the raft, supporting the body of the tribune in his arms. The legionaries stood to windward to break if possible the force of the seas which continuously swept across the frail, tossing platform.

"There goeth the Emperor's treasure," whispered Attilius regretfully. "What will he think of us?"

"Not all of it," whispered the centurion to the young man, "for while thou wert unconscious we landed at Crete and turned over to the proconsul there all the gold and silver."

"And the jewels?"

"I have them on my person."

"That was well done. Cæsar will reward thee."

"Methinks," answered Regulus, smiling grimly as he looked over the tossing seas, "that no man will have a chance to reward us, for a greater power than Cæsar

hath us now within his grip. By Hercules, I have voyaged from Alexandria to far Britain and never saw I such a storm."

The old centurion looked down upon the young tribune as he spoke, but the eyes of Caius Attilius were closed. He had fainted, or died, under the strain of it all.

CHAPTER III

THE CORN SHIP OF ALEXANDRIA

A LITTLE group of men stood before the break of the poop of a large merchant ship about the size and build of the ill-fated *Isis*, belonging in fact to the same imperially licensed fleet of ships. They were sheltered in some degree from the furious storm from the east-northeast which blew upon the ship, by the high poop and the slight overhang of the deck above. For several days they had been tempest-tossed and at the mercy of this furious gale which the sailors called Euraquilo. They had sought to beat up into it, but its force had been so great that they had been compelled, first to furl the great mainsail, and then to strike the yard to the deck. After they had thus lowered and secured it, the labouring of the great ship in the immense seas raised by the storm had rendered it advisable to lighten her by getting rid of the immense and weighty spar, which accordingly they had with some difficulty cast overboard. They were drifting now before the wind, and only the hardest kind of work with the huge steering-oar, thrust out of an after port just forward of the cabin, kept the ship from broaching to and falling into the trough of the sea. Their endeavours to keep the ship hove to were supplemented by a little sail called the artemon, a small portion of

which was spread on a supplementary mast and yard, which raked out from the bows of the ship, like the bowsprit and spritsail yard of later days.

Skilful and resourceful seamen were aboard that ship. She was filled with wheat, in bulk, from Alexandria to Rome, and carried besides her crew some two hundred prisoners and their guards from the east end of the Mediterranean, who were being sent to Rome under escort for trial or punishment. Deeply laden, the ship had laboured frightfully in the heavy seas. The high forecastle and stern, where much of the weight was concentrated, made such ships apt to break in two in a seaway. To prevent this a heavy cable had been passed from the stem to stern posts above the deck, and by twisting it until it was as taut as a harp string, an immense support had been afforded to the vessel to help her sustain the longitudinal strain. And the better to enable her to resist the incessant battering of the waves, huge cables had been passed several times completely around the ship amidships, under the bottom that is, both forward and abaft the mast. The ends of these cables were brought up on deck and led through huge blocks to the capstans and bowsed taut. Undergirding, this necessary process was called.

Ancient ships were not so stoutly built or so well calculated to resist weather as the great sailing vessels of later centuries, and such expedients were usual and necessary. Indeed, the larger and better provided vessels, like those of the imperial line, invariably carried such cables for the very purpose of encircling the ship, for frapping her together, as it were.

The group aft consisted of the master of the ship, as usual an Egyptian-Greek, named Ptolemeus; a tall, distinguished looking centurion who had command of the century of legionaries which had been detailed to guard the prisoners, and a much smaller man of distinctly Jewish aspect. The helmeted centurion was dressed in the full armour of his rank and wore in addition a long, heavy cloak of scarlet to protect him from the chilling, misty rain of the late fall morning. The shipmaster was wrapped in a rough, warm Greek chlamys with a hood which was drawn over his head. The third person, the Hebrew, was clothed in a long, dull brown, much worn tunic encircled at the waist by a many-folded girdle of the same material. His head was covered with a dark crimson cloth, tightly bound in turban-like folds about his brows, yet showing beneath its edges a fringe of short, curly, iron grey hair matching his short grey beard. From the broad if somewhat stooped shoulders of this man hung a rusty black cloak, which had seen much hard service since it had been woven from goat's hair by the man's own hand years before.

The shipmaster was of middle size, the centurion unusually tall for a Roman, but the Hebrew, measured by any standard, was a small man. Yet as he stood in the centre of the group he was easily the most striking and commanding personality of the three. An indefinable air of ability and power appertained to him. Although one was the commander of the vessel, the other was the representative of the Emperor, while the Hebrew was only a prisoner, there was a marked defer-

ence, of which they were quite unconscious apparently, in their manner toward him.

The time was early in the morning. The sky was heavily overcast, they had enjoyed no glimpse of the sun for several days, and the weather promised none that day or soon thereafter. The air was filled with wind-driven spray and mist which sometimes developed into a fine, cold rain. Huge waves frequently broke over the ship. The decks were crowded with drenched and shivering men. Many of the prisoners were allowed the liberty of the ship at all times, and all were on deck in such an emergency, when any hour might see the foundering or wrecking of the vessel. The craven, slavish demeanour of most of the prisoners and their undisguised fear were thrown into high relief by the firm and steady courage of the legionaries posted where, in case of an outbreak, they could command the ship. The seamen, more or less accustomed to such scenes, were busy about their several duties, the principal one of which was the arduous labour of manning the pumps, for the ship was leaking badly in spite of her undergirding and the other precautions they had taken.

Breakfast had been served—a sorry meal indeed: a piece of hard bread, a handful of raw wheat, a scant draught of water mingled, in the case of the soldiers and officers, with a modicum of thin, sour wine. The centurion, the shipmaster, and the Hebrew who shared the small after cabin, had breakfasted within and had come forth on deck to discuss their situation. A huge Cappadocian pilot with two stout assistants, for the storm made the work hard, handled the great steering-

oar thrust out of a porthole to windward. To him the shipmaster addressed himself.

"Hath there been any change during thy watch?"

"None, master; the wind holdeth as steadily as ever. It hath not abated in violence."

"I scarcely expected any change," continued Ptolemeus.

He stepped forward a few paces and beckoned with his hand to an old seaman who was supervising and directing the gang of men at the pumps. The man turned, walked aft, and saluted.

"What hast thou to report?" asked the shipmaster.

"The water gaineth upon us in spite of all we can do."

"But slowly?"

"If the leak grow no worse we can keep it down provided the strength and the spirit of the men do not give way."

"Aye, it is hard work, back breaking and heart tearing, bending over the pumps," continued the captain.

"As to that, worthy shipmaster," said the little man, who was intently observing everything with a pair of very bright eyes, "thou hast the prisoners. They can relieve thy men, and even I, though I am old, am not helpless and shall be able to do my share with the rest."

"Paulus, thou hast well said," interposed the centurion. "Rather than drown ignobly without a struggle, I and my men will take their turns at whatever work may be necessary. They are a sturdy set," con-

tinued the soldier, looking with pride at his legionaries, "and will do well whatever they undertake."

"It hath not come to that yet," returned the shipmaster. "But, sirs, I thank ye for your good will. Should we need relief I will remember your proffers; not that thou, centurion, or thou, Paulus, wilt be permitted. The ordering of the one and the counselling of the other are more valuable than any labour of hand or arm which could be contributed by either or both of you."

"And what thinkest thou of our prospects, worthy shipmaster?" inquired the centurion.

The Greek shrugged his shoulders and extended his arms.

"We are in the hands of the gods," he said; "we have done all we can do. The ship driveth on."

"And what is thine opinion of the duration of the storm?"

"I have known Euraquilo to blow for two weeks steadily. Fortunately, we have plenty of sea room. There is nothing ahead, and to the westward but Sicilia and Melita, and while I have little on which to base any estimate of our course or direction, not having had sight of sun or stars for so long, I am inclined to the supposition that we are well to the southwest of them both. There is plenty of open water between Melita and the African coast. We may drive before the wind until it blow itself out."

"But that African coast? Is there no danger of our bringing up on it?"

"Grave danger. The wind hath not shifted, so far

as we can tell, but in this murky air and sea who could be sure from what direction it cometh? Lest we should fall on the quicksands of Syrtis I have spread a corner of the artemon forward yonder to balance the thrust of the rudder oar, and you see that though we are drifting, I strive to keep her head up to the wind as much as possible."

"And if the leak gain?"

"We can lighten the ship by discharging the cargo, but it is a slow process."

"And canst thou think of nothing more?"

"Nothing. All things that my skill and the experience of many years can suggest have been done."

"I can well believe that," answered the centurion. "Dost thou not agree, Paulus?"

"Twice I have suffered shipwreck," returned the Hebrew gravely, "and once I was a day and a night in the deep upborne by a frail raft to which I clung until rescued, but never saw I storm like this."

"And canst thou suggest anything?"

"Nothing further can be done. Often in my long life have I gone down upon the sea in ships, and the worthy shipmaster and his men have done all in their power. We are in the hands of Him who, on storm-tossed Galilee, said to wind and wave, '*Peace, be still.*'"

"And who was He?" asked Julius. "But I know thine answer," he smiled faintly, giving the other no time to reply, "that wondrous Jesus, called Christus, of Nazareth, whom thou declarest to be a God."

"For Whose sake," assented Paulus, smiling, and when he smiled his stern, austere countenance was il-

luminated with brightness, geniality, and charm, "I go to Rome a prisoner."

"By Hercules, thou art a strange man, Paulus, with thy crucified God," said Julius, the centurion, gravely. "I would hear more of thy religion when I have a convenient season."

"So said Antonius Felix, the most excellent procurator," answered Paulus, with equal gravity and greater emphasis, "but if he depend upon me his opportunity is lost."

"Indeed I think so," answered Julius, mistaking the other's meaning somewhat, "for unless the storm abate, I believe this straining ship will never weather it."

"Thou shouldst have hearkened unto me," said Paulus gravely, "and not loosed from Crete. Nevertheless, I think——"

But the Hebrew did not finish his words, for at that moment from out of the cabin came another man, habited like Paulus save that his head was bare as became his Greek birth and upbringing. He was an elderly man and a tall. Though not so old as Paulus his beard was longer and whiter. He stepped to the side of the other and laid his hand affectionately upon his arm.

"Art thou not imprudent to expose thyself to the rigour of the storm in this cold and cutting wind and rain when thou mightst remain within the shelter of the cabin, beloved teacher?"

"Nay, good Lucas, worthy yoke-fellow in the Gospel, that thorn in the flesh that troubleth me so often doth not prick me this morning, and after the confinement

of the night, I would fain breathe the air. Thou art my physician, I know——"

"Well, well," said Lucas, looking affectionately at his beloved preceptor and leader, "thou seemest in good health and spirits, for which Our Lord Christ be praised."

"His spirit doth help and cheer us all," answered Julius, referring to Paulus, of course. "I know not what we would do without him."

"It is not my spirit, brave centurion," returned the Hebrew, his hand pointing upward, "but His that sustaineth me and shall sustain you all."

Further conversation was interrupted by a hail from the forecastle. The shipmaster had withdrawn from the others and was talking to some of his crew when the man who had hailed came running aft.

"Sir," said he, "there is a raft in the water right ahead."

"A raft! Is it deserted?"

"There are men upon it."

"How many?"

"I cannot make out in the mist, but thou canst see for thyself from the weather side of the upper deck yonder."

"A raft hath been sighted," said the shipmaster, turning and climbing up the ladder to the poop deck, "there are men upon it, and——"

"Men in trouble upon a raft," exclaimed Paulus; "we must look to their salvation."

He turned, and with astonishing steadiness, considering the wild motion of the ship, followed the ship-

master up the ladder to the poop deck together with Julius and Lucas.

"It is there," said the seaman who had discovered the raft and reported it, pointing forward to a grey blur rising and falling in the seas.

They all stared in the direction of his outstretched hand.

"I make nothing of it," said Paulus at last.

"The brightness of thine eyes belieth their vision," said the shipmaster in some surprise.

"Even so," answered the other a little sadly.

"But they have seen things hidden from the rest of us," commented Lucas tenderly.

"I can see the raft plainly," said Julius. "There are men on it."

"I, too, make them out," said Lucas after a long stare. "See," he took the Hebrew by the shoulders, faced him in the right direction, and pointed. "Canst thou not distinguish them now?"

"Yes," answered Paulus, "faintly."

"Well, I see them clearly," said Julius.

"We can do but little for them," said the shipmaster. "It may be a few hours when we too shall be in as dangerous a situation."

"Meanest thou to make no effort to rescue them?" cried Paulus.

The shipmaster shook his head.

"That must not be," said the Hebrew positively. "Think of the emotions of those men as we pass by. I tell thee, I myself have clung to a piece of timber and have waited and watched a heedless ship sail away,

and but that I was sustained by the Lord's Christ, my heart had broken with the abandonment."

"As ever, Paulus is right," said Julius decisively, "and I am much mistaken if those men be not Romans," he continued, shading his eyes and looking hard. "They look to me like soldiers. Thou must e'en do what thou canst, Master Ptolemeus."

"Have it your way, my masters," said the Greek smoothly, "although I should think there were enough souls already aboard this over-laden, over-crowded, leaking ship. Although I can do but little, I will try."

He measured the bearing of the raft with his hand. There were half a dozen figures on it, and they were gesticulating wildly. One of them was waving an officer's cloak of scarlet, the paludament making a vivid dash of colour against the dull grey background of sky and mist and sea. The shipmaster stepped to the break of the poop and called to the pilot and directed him to throw the ship well up into the wind. He next spoke to an under officer and bade him lower the shred of the artemon that had been spread forward. He did not think that the ship would broach to, yet he did not order them to furl the scrap of sail forward but to hold it in their hands so that it could be set again in a moment. The pilot, comprehending all, so skilfully used the huge steering-oar that, deprived of the sail forward, the ship swept slowly up into the wind.

A few minutes' drift showed that she would bring the raft under her lee in a short time.

"Thou darest not launch the boat, I suppose?" asked Julius, when this manœuvre had been completed.

"Not for a moment could the attempt be made," was the seaman's answer. He then cried out to the men, "Let ropes be provided upon the lee side for casting to the occupants of the raft."

The ship was low in the water, and the men on the raft could be lifted on board by the men on the decks, once the raft had been drawn alongside. The manœuvre was practicable enough, the only danger being that the leeway of the ship would be somewhat greater than was anticipated, in which case she might rise upon a wave and crash down upon the frail raft, which would be the end of all on that crazy platform. But the handling of the steersman was admirable. Working his steering-oar frantically he barely cleared the raft, and as the platform on the crest of a huge wave rushed along to leeward, ropes were cast, its momentum was stayed, and it was drawn alongside, where it ground heavily against the planking. The rail of the ship was black with men, hands were stretched out, and one after another the half-dozen living men standing on the raft were hoisted aboard.

As they were dragged over the rail, however, a prostrate man was discovered lying upon the raft, his head and shoulders supported in the arms of the last of the soldiers. The raft was moving aft, the ship forward. There was but little time to spare. At the shipmaster's suggestion, two of the seamen leaped from the ship to the raft. They tied ropes around the prostrate man by which he was dragged hurriedly to the deck. Not until then did the man holding him release his grasp. He, too, was dragged aboard, hands were extended, and

the two sailors also scrambled back. The scrap of sail forward was hoisted again, the ship fell away on her previous course, and the raft was instantly left behind.

The rescued men were surrounded by a crowd at once, and many tongues wagged curiously to know their story. He who had come last aboard, however, picked up in his arms the body that had been hauled from the raft by the ropes and carried it aft in his arms, his bearing being such as would indicate the propriety of his approaching that end of the ship. He looked haggard and old, his cuirass and helmet were rusty, and his cloak was faded and water-stained, but the centurion Julius recognised him at once.

"Why, it is my old comrade, Regulus, by Hercules!" he exclaimed, stepping forward with hands extended in welcome.

"Julius of the Augustan band," answered Regulus, a smile appearing on his countenance, "and this is the *Osiris*, the gods be praised!"

"The same, and glad am I that the gods permit me to serve thee. But who hast thou here?"

"The noble tribune, Caius Attilius."

"Thou shalt take him to mine own cabin," answered Julius, pushing aft. "This way," he cried.

"Hast thou a physician on board?" continued Regulus.

"I am a physician," said Lucas, stepping forward.

"Thou shalt have rich reward if thou canst preserve the life of the noble tribune."

"Without that, but for the service of mankind alone," answered Lucas gravely, "I will do my best."

"This way," cried Julius, and in a short time the two centurions, with Lucas the physician and Paulus the Hebrew, were crowded in the little bare cabin allotted to Julius, which was, of course, the best and largest cabin upon the ship, as he was the highest officer thereon.

Caius Attilius, wasted to a mere skeleton and unconscious, was laid upon the couch. Lucas stooped over him and examined him skilfully and rapidly with an ever deepening gravity of face.

"He hath had the greater fever?" he questioned, looking up at Regulus.

"Aye, the African, but it broke the day our ship foundered."

"Blood hath been let from him by this spear thrust."

"That, too."

"He liveth," said the physician at last, "but barely. His chances of life are small."

"Let me look at him," said Paulus.

"Art thou, too, a physician?" asked Regulus, giving up his place by the side of the couch to the Hebrew.

"A physician of the soul."

"He needeth no such doctor," answered the primipilus grimly.

"On the contrary, he and the whole world cry aloud for my healing," was the gentle yet decided answer.

"Give Paulus his way, friend Regulus," said Julius. "He hath a strange power."

"And if I have, the Spirit which possesses me," said Paulus, stepping over to Attilius and laying his hand upon him, "declareth that the young man shall live and

some day——" He stopped and compressed his lips. "Have no dark fears," he said confidently, "he shall not die but live. Yet do thou, Lucas, exercise all thy skill over this goodly youth, for I see that he shall be profitable to me some day for the Gospel."

"As thou sayest it shall be, beloved Paulus," answered Lucas. "If it be possible, worthy centurion, do thou order that a fire be kindled and some broth heated. The fever is broken, I take it, and the man is starving. The dry bread and water which is our fare will hardly suffice for such as he, now."

"I will see to it," said Julius, "if I have to fire the ship."

"And while thou speakest of food," said Regulus grimly, "I have had three days without either food or drink, and even that dry bread and turgid water would be nectar and ambrosia to a poor soldier."

"Bear with me," said Julius. "I do reproach myself that I should have forgot thee, and as thou breakest thy fast thou canst tell me what bringeth thee hither and in such a plight."

CHAPTER IV

THE PRISONER IN COMMAND

The condition of the great ship *Osiris* and her passengers had been bad enough on the day on which they rescued Caius Attilius and his men from the raft, but after eleven days of such fierce, long-continued buffeting as none of the seamen or passengers had ever before experienced, which indeed made a total of fourteen days of storm since they had left Fair Havens, the ship was in a frightful condition. They had got rid of everything they could come at except the cargo. They had cut away the mast and cast overboard the tackling and gearing, even the scanty, movable furniture of the cabins and the places where the prisoners slept between decks had gone in a vain attempt to lighten the ship. The cargo would be the last thing to be jettisoned.

With the pumps and buckets they had bailed the leaking ship until absolute and entire exhaustion caused a stoppage of the work. They had all, from the highest to the lowest, been put upon the shortest of short allowances of provisions and water for the greater part of the time. Physical weariness, with their hunger and thirst and their pains and desires, had quite obscured their sense of peril. Most of the people of the *Osiris* were utterly worn out and were equally indifferent.

Some of them had already sunk into the torpor of silent despair. A few of the hardier spirits, the stoics among the Romans and the prisoners, alone manifested courage and willingness to keep up the almost hopeless fight against wind and sea in the doomed ship.

Roman pride caused Julius, the centurion, and Regulus, the primipilus, to keep a brave front toward the disaster. The soldiers looked with philosophic contempt upon the despair of the poorer sort among the prisoners, who were in the great majority. Ptolemeus, the captain of the ship, with the pilots who seconded him in his efforts at navigation, preserved a certain amount of calm. Lucas, the cool, collected physician, had been untiring in his ministrations to all who needed such medical attention as his skill and the scanty supply of drugs could afford.

But the spirit that was highest and bravest and noblest of all the little company was that of the Hebrew Paulus. The skill of Lucas availed much, but the gentle smile and the kindly strength and confidence and courage that emanated from the personality of the little Tarsian were a thousandfold more precious and more helpful. As tireless as the centurions, or the ship's officers, Paulus went to and fro among the men, distributing words of comfort and cheer, of confidence and assurance, to high and low alike. Most of the soldiers met his advances with contemptuous disdain; with them his Roman citizenship counted for little except as a political privilege. In their eyes, he was a prisoner and a Hebrew; a member of that arrogant race which regarded all other peoples with hatred and contempt

and which all other peoples repaid to the full measure and in kind—especially the Romans.

But the prisoners looked to him with joy. Few of these last were Hebrews. They were a motley assemblage representing all phases of life and all varieties of race in the Orient: Little-Asians, tall, blond Galatians, black-haired Greeks; swarthy Syrians, olive-cheeked Egyptians, fierce Cappadocians and Bithynians, graceful and depraved Cypriots; worshippers of every god and none; committers of crimes nameable and unnameable, offenders against the massive majesty of Roman law; old and young, high and low, rich and poor, it seemed incredible that One God could have been the Maker of them all. There were a few of the better sort among them, men like Paulus, who were being carried Romewards because in the provincial courts they had pleaded their Roman citizenship and had appealed unto Cæsar for his personal judgment, as indeed they had a legal right to do. But most of the captives were destined to bloody deaths in the arena, in hopeless condemnation—food for wild beast or wilder gladiator.

Partly because of his privilege as a Roman citizen, by birth and not by purchase, but more on account of the extraordinary personality of the man, which strangely impressed all with whom he came in contact, the place of Paulus among the principal officers, including Julius, the centurion, was unquestionable. He came and went freely in accordance with his fancy. He had one of the smaller after cabins allotted to him, which he shared with Lucas. His age, his experience, and an indefinable but not the less recognisable air of

power about him added to his importance and established him in a condition rare and unusual even in a prisoner of the highest rank appealing to the Emperor. And that position and its privileges he entered upon without assertiveness or indeed effort, but quite naturally.

Neither Regulus nor Julius was of gentle blood, but they were men who had mingled freely and upon such terms of intimacy as their soldier life permitted with the noblest and best, not only of Rome but of nearly all of the countries of the world. They instinctively felt themselves in the presence of an aristocrat, by birth, breeding, and character, when they conversed with Paulus, although he was of the simplest in his manner and bearing. In short, he lent rather than took, honour from his Roman citizenship.

That Hebrew Paulus was a born Roman citizen of a wealthy and influential family of the important city of Tarsus; that he had been cast off by his family and was hated by his nation because he preached the Gospel of one Jesus of Nazareth called Christus, who, he had heard vaguely, was a fanatic who had been executed upon the cross by Pontius Pilate when he was procurator of turbulent Judea, was well known to Julius. Indeed, the Hebrew declared that the same Christus had risen from the dead! That was the frequent burden of his converse, and he claimed it was because of that declaration that he was a prisoner, a statement which Julius could by no means understand.

In conversation with Paulus these substantial Romans had not failed to observe that he was a man of sound

sense and great learning in discussing any other subject. It was evident that he had been thoroughly educated and had enjoyed a wide acquaintance of men and manners. Julius came to the conclusion after a time, in which Regulus joined, when he came to know Paulus better, that much learning had unsettled the mind of Paulus on the one subject which he was ever fain to discuss—the Divinity of that Christus, and that He had risen from the dead and had the highest place among the gods, by the side of great Jupiter himself—so they dimly apprehended it. And yet as Paulus reasoned with them about these, to them, impossible occurrences, strange ideas would come into the mind of Julius, which he could neither explain nor explain away.

Among all on the ship there was one especially whose gratitude to the Hebrew sage and Greek physician grew with every passing day. The determination of Regulus, enforced by the command of Julius, that whoever might suffer from lack of food it should not be the young tribune, had caused the preparation of reasonably suitable fare with which to build up the wasted tissues and restore the impaired strength of Caius Attilius. With difficulty fires were kindled each day and nourishing broths were made ready for the invalid.

Contrary to the prognostications of Lucas, but in accordance with the deeper insight of Paulus, the tribune daily gained in strength and spirit. He was still immeasurably weak, but each day marked a decided advance toward the goal of restored health and strength.

Happily possessed of an iron constitution, accustomed by long service to all the hardships and vicissitudes of a soldier's life, which had been his lot for so long a time, with a body clean because it was the tabernacle of a soul which kept itself pure amid the excesses of the day and generation—these all stood him in good stead now.

He had gone through a terrible experience, however. The ghastly fever had been long and wasting, the spear thrust in the side had drained much blood from a body which had none to spare, the days of exposure and starvation upon the open raft had brought the vitality of the man to the very lowest ebb. And so, although he grew daily better he was still far from well, weak and ill indeed, and scarcely able to help himself much.

"The gods have been good to thee, noble Attilius," said old Regulus, standing by the side of Paulus as they both looked down upon the young man late one evening before they made ready for the night.

"Even so," answered the Roman weakly.

"And in thy behalf I have promised an ox to Hercules, my patron, should we reach Rome safely."

"What sayest thou to that, O wise Paulus?" asked Attilius, looking up at the composed face.

"The God I serve, young tribune," replied the sage, "delighteth not in the blood of bulls and goats."

"What sacrifice then?" asked the invalid wonderingly.

"In the sacrifice of men," was the startling answer. "Thou and thy companion, Lucas, have saved my

life," answered the tribune, "and yet I like not human sacrifice. Moloch, Baal, I hate. If that be thy religion——"

"Nay, thou mistakest me. It is the sacrifice of self that I preach. That we should resist sin even unto blood. That we should suffer all things, endure all things, bear all things for His sake and for the sake of those who are made in His image."

"And what is this strange word sin of which thou speakest? Is it disobedience to the will of the gods?"

"By Hercules," said old Regulus, "I know of no greater fault in a soldier than disobedience to the orders of his captain."

"Thou hast well said, disobedience to the laws of God," answered Paulus, looking approvingly at the old soldier, "that is sin—disobedience to the moral law involved when men lie and steal and lust and murder."

"Is that all?"

"It is but the half of human duty," answered Paulus.

"What more?"

"He I serve summed it up thus, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbour as thyself.'"

"But if thy neighbour be thine enemy?" queried Attilius.

"'Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you,'" quoted the Hebrew with deep solemnity.

"Strange advice to a soldier, old man," commented Regulus contemptuously. "If we loved our enemies, what would Rome be?"

"Heaven," answered Paulus gravely, "instead of the hell it now is."

"I know not," said Regulus, "where the Elysian Fields do lie, but with money in his purse, a roof to cover him, good wine to drink, and maybap a woman to cherish him, with slaves to come to his call, one might be indifferent happy in the Imperial City."

"There is a happiness thou knowest not, O soldier," answered the other, "and it doth not consist of the things of this earth."

"Maybe, maybe," returned the Roman imperturbably, "but what I do know is enough for a veteran of thirty years of service. But the tribune groweth weary."

"It is even so," said Paulus, laying his hand upon the head of the young man. "Good-night."

"Wait," said Attilius, "what is the name of this God whom thou servest?"

"Jesus of Nazareth, surnamed Christus."

"I shall remember His name. And didst thou pray to Him for me?"

"Many a time."

"I am grateful. I shall cause a statue of Him to be placed in the Pantheon and sacrifices to be made in His honour."

Paulus shook his head.

"That thou art grateful is well," he said, "but my

God standeth not with the heathen gods. Alone He shall fill the Pantheon and the world even—some day."

What further might have passed between the two was interrupted by a wild outburst of yells outside the cabin. Above the thundering of the waves alongside and the beat of the spray upon the deck rose a tumult of cries in which could be heard above all the words:

"Breakers!"

"Breakers on the right hand!"

"Breakers ahead!"

The inert ship and her hapless company were suddenly galvanised into action. Lucas thrust his head in at the door. Behind him stood the tall form of Julius.

"Paulus," began the latter hurriedly, "where art thou?"

"Here, and at thy service," answered the Hebrew, gathering his cloak about him and stepping swiftly toward the door and thence out on deck.

Regulus stopped by the side of Attilius for a moment.

"Should any danger impend," he said, "trust me to see thee safely through with my life."

He then turned and followed the others out on deck. The shipmaster had mounted the high poop with one of the pilots. They were staring hard to leeward at a line of white seen imperfectly yet clearly enough to bespeak what it was in the darkness of the stormy night. Scarcely an eighth of a mile away the waters, driven

by the mighty gale, were leaping over a reef and throwing columns of ghostly white spray high into the sodden air. The most inexperienced could read beneath those white beating seas, rocks, which, should the ship touch them, meant the instant and certain destruction of all.

The apathy, the weakness, the dull indifference that had possessed the human cargo had all disappeared. Men stood and stared, a few silently, most crying loudly and gesticulating violently, others running aimlessly to and fro in their despair. The peril was so close, the drive of the ship although slow was so inevitably toward the reef, that even the shipmaster abandoned hope.

"Thou hast said, O worthy Paulus," began the centurion, "that we should escape with our lives. What thinkest thou of that?"

"Sirs," said Paulus, raising his voice high that all might hear, "be of good cheer. There shall be no loss of any man's life among us, although the ship shall be cast away. There stood by me this night the angel of God, Whose I am and Whom I serve, saying, 'Fear not, Paulus; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.' Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, and it shall be even as it was told me."

"But my ship!" exclaimed the captain of the vessel.

"Naught can save her. Before us is some island; we shall be cast upon it."

"The will of the gods be done," said the Greek captain resignedly. "We are helpless."

"Nay, not yet," interposed Julius stoutly, "there is surely something we can do."

"Bid one of the seamen sound the water alongside," said Paulus. "What is the hour?"

"It is near the middle of the night," said Regulus, joining them. "Are we lost?"

"Not yet," was the reply of the Hebrew.

"How much water have we alongside?" cried the captain as the under officer came aft with a weighted line dripping wet in his hand.

"Twenty fathoms, sir."

"In what depth canst thou anchor?" asked Paulus of the shipmaster.

"In twenty, if necessary, but in a less depth, better still."

"We approach the shore," said Julius, "more nearly."

"It is still some distance off," answered Paulus. "Head the ship up into the wind."

"Turn her with thy steering-oar," cried the shipmaster to the pilot.

"Sound again, worthy seaman," said the Hebrew.

"The water shoals, sir," cried the old sailor, after another cast of the leaded line. "It is but fifteen fathoms deep now."

"If we are to anchor before we drift upon the reef it should be done now," suggested the shipmaster, astonishingly deferential to this mysterious Hebrew.

Paulus nodded his head, and answered:

"Cast into the sea from the stern all of thy great

tackling and every anchor. We shall scarce hold even then against the mighty drive of the fierce wind."

"Lay aft here," roared the captain. "Break out the anchors. Worthy centurion," he turned to Julius, "if thy men would help;—the anchors are heavy, my men are few."

"Legionaries to me!" cried Julius.

"And if there be any of the prisoners who would also bear assistance," cried Paulus, "let them come hither."

The after part of the ship, in obedience to these hails, was soon filled with men eager to help. Lanterns had been lighted. In the dim radiance cast they busied themselves with the heavy anchors and the great tackling. Paulus and the two officers stepped back and left the direction to the shipmaster. Under his skilful management, the anchors were at last got overboard and the ship brought to. The thrust of the sea and the wind was tremendous. For some time the shipmaster, the pilots, the under officers, Paulus, and the two centurions hung over the stern staring, but after dragging for some distance the anchors caught, the ropes tautened, and the ship came to a stand but a short distance from the breakers.

"Will they hold, thinkest thou?" anxiously asked Julius of the commander of the vessel as she was finally brought to.

"I know not. If the wind freshen I think it hardly likely. I would that it were day."

"And I, too," answered Regulus. "I like not this fighting in the dark; give me the sunlight shining on

the helm, the open enemy in the field. I hate this mist and sea."

"What dost thou propose now?" asked the centurion of the captain.

"When day breaketh and we see where we are I shall endeavour to beach the ship, if there be any beach among these reefs, and we can then get ashore. The ship is low in the water, she is like to founder during the night."

A sailor came running aft, forcing his way through the crowd of men upon the decks, and stepped to the side of his captain.

"A word in thine ear, sir," he said.

The two whispered together for a moment, and then both walked rapidly forward.

"I like not that," said Paulus after a little while, seeing that the shipmaster did not return. "Let us go forward, centurions."

"As thou wilt," answered Julius. "Come, Regulus."

"Ye have your swords with you?"

"If we are to die," answered Julius, "we prefer to die like Romans with our arms at hand."

"Who knoweth what need of them we may have——"

"Keep them in readiness," interposed the old Hebrew.

"I thought thou wert a man of peace, Paulus," commented Regulus half sarcastically as they forced their way forward through the excited throng upon the deck.

"And so I am, but there are times when—Ah!" cried the Hebrew, "I was not deceived! Look yonder!"

He pointed forward where some sailors under direction of the master had, by means of tackling, raised the small boat the ship carried, and had her already swung in the air about to drop into the water alongside.

"What meaneth this?" thundered Julius, springing into the midst of the group.

The face of the shipmaster suddenly paled.

"We—we were preparing to cast another anchor from the bows," he faltered.

"Every anchor in the ship," said Paulus quietly, "hath been cast astern, and to what purpose wouldst thou anchor by the bows?"

"Jewish dog!" cried the shipmaster, turning upon him furiously. "What business is it of thine? Art thou in command of the ship?"

"Silence!" thundered Julius. "Thou art addressing a Roman citizen, and if there be dispute as to who commandeth, remember that I am here."

"And I," added Regulus.

"And we represent Cæsar and the Empire."

"Sirs," said Paulus, "take no thought for me, but cut away the boat."

The shipmaster started uneasily.

"We shall have great need of the services of the seamen later," continued Paulus earnestly. "If they abandon the ship now we cannot be saved."

"Shall we not need the smaller vessel?" asked Regulus.

"Nay, she could not float in such a sea, and——"

"Paulus is right," said Julius.

He made a step forward. A low growl rose from

the men clustered about him. Regulus unsheathed his sword and sprang to his friend's side.

"What ho! Legionaries to me!" cried Julius at the same moment.

Instantly upon his call came the soldiers. They brushed away the seamen unceremoniously.

"Cut me those ropes," said Julius, pointing to those which held the boat suspended.

A few swords flashed suddenly in the darkness, and the pinnace fell into the sea. A cry of despair rose from the sailors.

"Silence," commanded the centurion. "Ye thought to desert us. If we perish, so, too, shall you, and lest there be no mistake about it, we will send you to the nether world ahead of us on our sword points."

"Worthy centurion——" began the shipmaster.

"And thou art the coward in chief," cried Julius. "Get thee to thy cabin, nor show thy face until I command. By Jupiter, I am fain to run thee through where thou standest, thou white-cheeked craven."

The centurion made a threatening movement toward the sea captain. The latter recoiled, and it was Paulus who interposed.

"Said I not," he remarked gently, "that God hath given me all in the ship? Put up thy sword. And now it is my counsel that whatever provision remain be served out generously to all on board. We have fasted and starved for fourteen days, saving our supply, for we knew not when it would be replaced, but our voyage endeth here."

"It is well said," answered Julius. He turned to

some of the soldiers. "Go to the storeroom and bring what you find there upon the deck, and be speedy about it."

"Give me leave," said Paulus a short time after, as the men came back bearing cooked and salted meat and sacks of bread.

He took some of the bread in his hands, broke it, and blessed it, uttering a prayer as he did so, and then under the supervision of the centurion the provisions were divided impartially among all who were there.

"This eating," said Paulus, as the division proceeded, "is for your health. And I bid you be of good cheer, for there shall not a hair fall from the head of any one of you."

After they had eaten and drunk their fill, having done all, they waited anxiously upon the deck for the dawn of the day.

CHAPTER V

THE SIGN AND THE BLESSING

They did not await the longed-for day in idleness, however, for by the advice of the Hebrew, whose qualities of leadership manifested themselves more and more as the danger grew greater, the prisoners, under the supervision of the soldiers, were set to work at lightening the vessel. A good deal of the cargo had already been cast into the sea, but there was yet left aboard a considerable proportion, and as the ship was making water fast, and as her drag upon the anchors was tremendous, it was deemed best to lighten her as much as possible. Besides, it may be imagined that Paulus and the others shrewdly reasoned that men busily employed were less apt to be troublesome than those that had nothing whatever to do, and the hard work, therefore, served a double purpose.

Paulus, of course, attempted no supervision of such work. That was efficiently overseen by the two centurions, who worked in perfect harmony together, he of the higher rank, for the occasion, cheerfully submitting himself to the direction of him charged with the safety of the prisoners and the movement of the ship. So the long hours dragged away on the doomed vessel.

The wished-for day broke at last, if possible colder and more stormy than ever. At the first glimpse of

dawn eager eyes searched the shore. There, close under their lee, lay a barren ridge of rocks extending far to the eastward, over which the waves rolled furiously. They had brought to the ship just in time, a half cable length further and she would have taken ground upon the reef, and in the darkness of the night probably most of them would have been lost. Forward and on the right hand land could be seen dimly in the grey light. The shores were low and in general rocky and ill adapted for beaching the ship. The country was desolate and there were yet no signs of humanity.

The place in which they had come to anchor was a deep bay enclosed on one side by the projecting point upon which they had so nearly driven, and on the other side by a rocky islet which ran almost to the main shore. Under the lee of the islet, which lay well to the north-west of them, they finally discovered a stretch of sandy beach, suitable for their purpose. Their only hope of safety lay in beaching the ship there, and whatever they were to accomplish had to be attempted without delay, for the vessel was about to founder beneath their feet.

Summoning the pilot, and the master from his cabin, where he had been confined, Julius peremptorily bade them get the ship under way. Regulus, meanwhile, went into the cabin accompanied by some of the men, and presently appeared supporting Caius Attilius, whom he had sworn not to desert. It would be a matter of great difficulty to get the yet more or less helpless tribune ashore, but in spite of himself, although he believed not at all in the God that Paulus preached, there

was a certain amount of comfort to the old sailor in the assurance he had received. He told these hopes to young Attilius, who remarked that if he had to die he trusted that he could show his Roman fortitude as well in the face of a watery grave as before an enemy's spear thrust.

In order to give the ship sufficient way the shipmaster, after carefully examining the situation, ordered the smaller sail called the artemon to be hoisted on the raking-mast forward, and at the same time he instructed the seamen, who were provided with sharp axes for the purpose, to cut away the straining cables aft. There was no use in wasting time or labour in weighing or hauling up the anchors. The ship must infallibly break up even if they succeeded in running her ashore, and to cut the cables was the simplest and the quickest method to free her. From the condition of the ship Ptolemeus promptly decided that there was pressing need for haste.

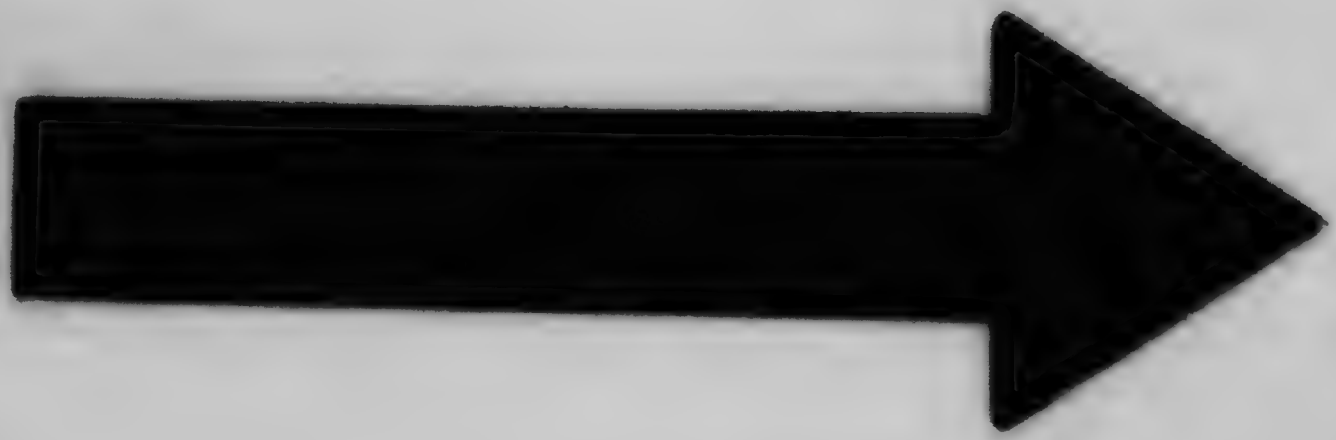
At a given signal, therefore, the sailors hoisted the artemon, hauled aft the sheets, the anchors were cut away, and the lashings which had lifted the huge rudder paddles clear of the water and secured them were cast adrift. The wind had changed slightly, and under the drag of the forward sail and the skilful steering of both the pilot and the shipmaster in person, the *Osiris* drove rapidly toward the beach. Narrowly escaping the rocks on one hand or the other, she finally ran into the shallow water under the lee of the islet to the northward. The wind still held, and they were enabled, by the comparative cessation of the huge rollers broken

by the islet, to control her course somewhat better until they passed the end of the islet and got the full force of a counter current which ran through a narrow channel between the islet and the mainland. This swift current cast the head of the ship to the southwest, but not enough to make void the nice calculation of the steersmen, for in a moment a huge roller lifted her up and hurled her forward until, with a frightful concussion, she buried her stem in the sand of the shore.

It was some little distance from the bow of the ship to the land. Some of the older soldiers suggested to Julius that they now kill the prisoners out of hand lest they should escape in the confusion, but the centurion disdained the counsel, more especially on account of Paulus than of any other. He gave command accordingly that all who could swim, prisoners, soldiers, sailors alike, should cast themselves into the sea and endeavour to reach the land as best they could. A hardy soldier was the first to make the attempt. Throwing aside shield and spear, but otherwise accoutred as he was, he plunged from the bow of the ship into the water and struck out for the shore. It was but a short distance after all, and his success, especially when he turned and waved his hand in triumph, inspired others, and soon the water was black with bobbing heads and tossing figures.

Presently the decks were more or less deserted. There were, perhaps, two score men who could not swim, the superior officers of the ship, and the two centurions, Paulus and Lucas and Caius Attilius left on board.

"Sirs," began Ptolemeus to the two centurions, "I



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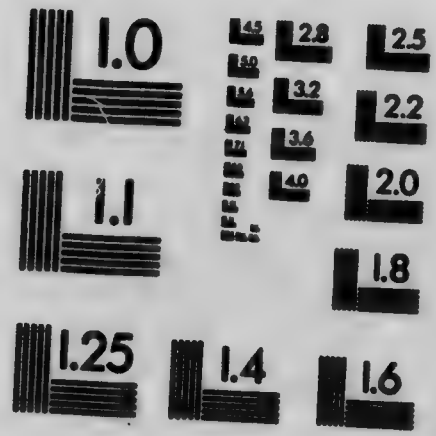

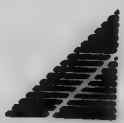

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have done everything that I can. The ship is about to break up. See ye any reason why I should tarry longer?"

"Go," said Julius contemptuously.

"Worthy centurions," said Caius Attilius as the shipmaster and the pilot ran forward, "trouble yourselves no longer for me."

"By thy leave, Caius Attilius," said Regulus bluntly, "we will get thee safe to shore, and thou, Paulus, and thy companion, Lucas."

"Give thyself no concern in my behalf," said Paulus, "I can swim. My life had been forfeit five times were it not so, and Lucas as well, but indeed I think we would all better remove to the fore part of the ship."

At that moment a huge wave struck the vessel. The weakened fabric began to give way under the hammering, hard and long continued. Another roller followed, but before it struck the counter the remainder of the people still upon the *Osiris* were huddled together in the bows. It was well that they had left the after part, for before their very eyes the doomed ship, strained and battered beyond measure, fairly broke in two and a whirling mass of timbers was dashed by the seas toward the shore. This proved the salvation of those who could not swim, for they made haste to drop into the water, and seizing whatever afforded them support, were carried by the waves toward the shore until they were within reach of their companions, who formed human chains by linking hands and wading out into the surf to the rescue of the helpless ones buffeted to and

fro in the boiling seas. It was a work of great danger on account of the débris of the wreck, which was tossed about by the waves, but the soldiers were ever men of daring and there were skilful and brave men among the prisoners, too.

Presently all were safe but the two centurions, the Hebrew, the Greek physician, and the young man. The remains of the ship were now lower in the water than ever. The sea began to make clean breaches over what was left. Regulus and Julius had bound two or three pieces of timber together. They now shoved their hastily improvised raft over the side. Caius Attilius was laid upon it, and with one man swimming at each side, holding him on it, they struck out for the shore, followed by Paulus and Lucas. They were driven back and forth by the oncoming and receding waves, but finally aided by the chain of soldiers, who were resolved that their officers should not perish, the whole party successfully made a landing. Strange to say, Attilius was not much the worse for this, his second encounter with the angry seas.

They had scarcely gained the shore when the ship, even that portion which had been buried in the sand, was completely torn to pieces. By Julius' direction pieces of the wreckage were gathered in piles on the shore well above the high-water mark, and with flint and steel and some dry tinder that had almost miraculously escaped wetting in the possession of one of the soldiers, huge fires were soon blazing, around which they crowded, warming themselves and drying their wet garments, for the water was icy cold.

It seemed as if in the final effort which had wrecked the ship the storm had at last spent itself, for with as much suddenness as it had arisen, the tempest, which had blown with such violence for fourteen days, now rapidly died away. The sun came out to their great comfort. By Julius' direction the prisoners were gathered together and placed under guard. Scouting parties were sent inland, which soon came in touch with the inhabitants of the island, which they learned was called Melita or Malta. The whole party marched inland, therefore, until they came to a populous town, the seat of government.

The Roman governor of the island, one Publius, received them with courtesy and kindness, provided food and clothing for them, and quartered them according to their degree. Paulus, although he was a prisoner, with Lucas, was by the request of Julius given the same comfortable treatment and enjoyed the same pleasant hospitality which was meted out to the two centurions and the tribune. And when the governor of the island heard that one of the vipers, with which the island abounded, whose bite was deadly, had fastened upon the hand of Paulus as he had gathered sticks for the fire on the beach, and that the Hebrew had received no hurt from the serpent, merely shaking the reptile into the fire, he even reverenced him as enjoying in some strange way the favour of the gods!

It chanced that the father of the governor lay within the palace sick of a fever and a bloody flux. Bringing Paulus to the bedside of the sick man, Publius requested his good services in behalf of the invalid. Paulus laid

his hands upon him and prayed, and the fever presently left him, the flux was stopped, and the man was made well. The fame of this miraculous cure spread over the island, and many sick were brought and laid at the feet of this strange wonder worker and he healed them all. And in this work Lucas gave much timely and valuable counsel and assistance.

In two weeks Caius Attilius was able to travel. His rank and his wealth procured for him the use of a small ship to take him to Sicily. Attended by Regulus and those of the soldiers of the Fourteenth Legion who had survived the wreck of the *Isis*, Attilius embarked for home, for that Rome from which he had been so long absent. Julius, with Paulus and Lucas and the other prisoners and the soldiers of the Augustan band, were forced to tarry longer for the opening of navigation and a larger ship.

The Roman was not unmindful of the kindness he had received from the Hebrew.

"Thou goest to Rome as a prisoner to be tried," he said as he bade him farewell. "I know not what be these gods whom thou servest, O wise Paulus, but thou shalt see that a Roman is not ungrateful. If ever thou needest a friend, I pray thee call upon me."

"And upon me as well," added Regulus, "although my influence is but small as I am but a plain, blunt, old soldier seeking retirement."

"I thank thee, noble Attilius," answered Paulus, "and thee also, worthy centurion. Although my Master and Lord is able to deliver me even from the lions' mouths if need be, I am not foolish enough to disdain

the help of men, and it may hap that I shall call upon thee."

"Good," said the tribune heartily. "And thou, too, Lucas, I would fain help. Thou hast served me well. That I am alive at this hour is in no small part due to thy skill, I am sure."

"Thou honourest me, my lord," said the gentle physician. "Like my teacher and leader, Paulus, I ask nothing for myself, but shouldst thou meet with this appeal from any in trouble, I pray thee heed it for the sake of what we may have done for thee."

As he spoke, with his fingers Lucas traced in the air the outlines of a fish. The two Romans stared at the Greek in some amazement.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," said Attilius, "thou hast traced a fish with thy fingers."

"It is even so," answered the physician.

"And what meaneth it?"

"It is the sign of those who think as we."

"I understand it not," said the tribune.

"Perhaps some day," said Paulus, smiling, "thou shalt know."

"Perhaps. Meanwhile the sign itself is plain, and for your sakes I will remember."

"And I," added Regulus.

"I am an old man," said Paulus, lifting his hand, "and though like thee I am a Roman citizen, I come of a race between which and the proud people of Rome but little love passeth, yet thou canst take an old man's blessing."

Something in the gesture and the tone of Paulus

affected Attilius strangely. He bent his head, and Paulus laid his hand upon it. With upturned face he murmured strange words. There was something in the scene which moved Regulus strangely. He had been standing at ease. He gathered himself together and his hand touched his helmet in military salute. It was his way of acknowledging the presence of something which he could not understand.

And so they parted.

Book II

MASTER AND SLAVE

CHAPTER VI

THE BLOCK OF PHRYX

Nero was at Naples when Attilius and Regulus finally arrived at Rome. In view of the hard experiences of the tribune and his weakened condition the Imperator sent back word by the messenger who announced their arrival and the loss of the ship that Attilius should await the return of the court to the capital city to make his final and complete report. The order naturally included Regulus, who, pending the settlement of his affairs and his final retirement from active military service, cheerfully accepted the hospitality generously tendered him by the young tribune.

For some days Attilius rested quietly at home. With restored health he busied himself with his private affairs. He had been absent from Rome for a long time, and there was much to be done in the way of reordering his household after the fashion which was usually maintained by men of his rank and circumstances. By inheritance and good management and through his share in the plunder of many wars he was now the possessor of a very considerable fortune, well invested and highly productive. He was not one of the richest men in Rome by any means. He could not vie with the philosopher Seneca, for instance, who had been Nero's tutor, and the brightness of whose fame was already somewhat dimmed by his unbounded avarice; nor could he in any

way compare with Pallas, one of Nero's freedmen, the richest man of his time; nevertheless, his means were far above the average. He had neither father, mother, sister, nor brother, and he could afford to indulge his every fancy.

Attilius had served many years with the army, although he was still in his late twenties. He had lived a clean, decent life, and a hard one, and he desired now to take his proper place in society and to enjoy himself there. That desire for pleasant things did not take a low turn. He looked with disgust and even horror at the practices which were prevalent in Rome, especially in the class with which he naturally affiliated. There was something of the ancient spirit of the Roman of the best days of the Republic about him. He solemnly swore by the gods that he would not descend to the depths of iniquity so lightly sounded by practically all of his acquaintance. On the other hand, he did not propose by any undue austerity to pose as a censor of manners or morals. Others might do as they pleased. It was not his affair. He, at least, made up his mind to be clean and decent and a gentleman when cleanliness and decency were rare and gentlemen rarer still, especially among those who, technically at least, were entitled to the term.

As he gained strength, the first business that Attilius undertook was the refurnishing of his house. He was largely entertained, of course, and he could not but contrast the old-fashioned character of his dwelling and his household goods with the magnificently furnished, modern, and convenient houses of his friends. The

walls of the atrium sadly needed redecorating, for instance, he decided. New mosaics should replace the pavement, which had become broken in many places. The hangings in the doorways were old and faded, the fountain in the peristyle was of a fashion popular at least two generations back. And new furniture was needed everywhere.

The tribune's most serious requirement, however, was a complete establishment of household servants—slaves, that is. When he had started for the wars some ten years before, he had disposed of all except a few old family retainers, and he now commissioned his freedman and major-domo, Pheidippides, an able and devoted Greek of mature years, to buy many more, in the purchase of which Attilius took a lively interest. One of his first visits, therefore, was to the slave market. It had been counted a fortunate lot for a slave to be owned by Sabinus Attilius, the father of young Caius. In general, the slaves in Rome were horribly treated. They were scarcely regarded as human beings even by the best of owners, and they certainly did not receive the same care as a favourite horse, a milch cow, a blooded bull, or a Molossian hound. For one thing, most of these latter cost more than an ordinary slave.

Human chattels were a drug on the market. It was a poor patrician household indeed which did not boast of several hundred for domestic service alone, and when to these were added artificers and cultivators on country estates, for every great household was a little world in itself and produced practically everything needed for the inmates, the number speedily rose into the

thousands. Attilius had no idea how many slaves he owned, but he knew that there were not nearly enough to enable him to maintain the standard set by his neighbours on the Aventine, where his house was situated.

Accompanied by Pheidippides, who was his household supervisor and master of the slaves, an old and valued attendant of the family, he made extensive purchases in the slave markets, much more extensive indeed than his inclinations suggested, but, advised by this man and by friends old and new, he bought until even they were convinced that he had enough.

He had become unused to the degree of personal service slaves rendered, for a Roman household was now so ordered that a man had a slave for every possible function. Indeed, slaves usually had but one duty, and when that was performed they passed the rest of the day in an idleness which was not good for them. For instance, Attilius was told that he must have a slave whose sole task was to arrange the folds of his toga when he put it on over his tunic, a vestiplica so called, and this slave was always a woman, as women were rightly believed to possess more ability in draping gracefully the heavy and somewhat clumsy folds of the typical Roman garment. There was another slave, a man, whose sole duty it was to put on his sandals, or, in case he elected to wear them, his black leather boots with the silver crescent of his senatorial condition. And for every conceivable service there was a different man or woman.

The slave market was a very interesting place. There was usually spirited competition for strong, sturdy

men, for graceful boys, for learned philosophers, for witty poets, or story tellers, or skilful artisans, or mechanics, and, above all, for beautiful women. Bands of unfortunate captives, strange peoples from the far-flung frontiers of the Empire, were constantly arriving at the Capital. Rich men collected denizens of different lands as they collected fine dogs, or horses, or jewels, or embroidered garments, or Myrrhine vases. Slaves were invariably exhibited without clothes at the request of any buyer, and their good and bad physical points noted and discussed as if they had been animals. Sometimes frantic women fought for their modesty and desperate men for their dignity in the slave market. At such times the sport was almost as good as in the Circus, the assemblage bursting into uproarious laughter, watching the conflict between the slave dealers and their attendants and the slaves with evident relish and appreciation.

Attilius was sometimes shocked at these spectacles, but he was enough of a Roman and of a soldier to regard them on the whole with a certain amount of arrogant indifference. With Seneca and some of the more advanced thinkers of the time he was prepared to admit that slaves were human beings and had some rights which should be respected even by those who owned them. He had long since learned to control a naturally fierce temper, and he had a highly developed Roman sense of justice and order which extended even to his slaves. In many respects the pleasant traditions of the rule which had made his father's slaves envied would probably be perpetuated in his régime; yet his

long military training had made him severe and exacting. He required absolute obedience and prompt, unquestioned service and efficiency, without discussion of any sort, and he could be ruthlessly hard on occasion when any of these things were lacking.

One morning, a short time after his arrival, he was informed by a messenger from old Phryx, a vendor of slaves with whom he had already dealt largely, that a shipload of blond Iceni from the far-off island of Britain had been received recently which included some unusual specimens of human merchandise. With his friends, Senecio, Vestinus, Cotta, Pollio, and others of youthful and aristocratic Rome who had received similar messages, he had accordingly repaired to the slave market, attended as usual by old Regulus and a number of clients.

On one side of the court upon a low platform were massed a number of tall, fair-haired men and women. The buyers walked up and down in front of them, and if any of the poor captives caught the fancy of the prospective purchaser, the man or woman, as the case might be, would be put upon the block and offered for sale at auction. The demeanour of the captives was always interesting. Most of them were of the poorer sort of people—the great ones usually being reserved for triumphal processions or private sales—and they were usually cowed and broken by the misery of their position. But these people were different. There was a haughty, splendid contempt in the faces of many of them. They were evidently children of freedom. The men were sturdy specimens and some of the women were

beautiful. They were all good to look at, but poor materials for servitude. It was probable that the men, most of them, would be sent to the gladiatorial schools and the women bought by patricians who had country estates, where a sturdy form and fine physique indicated they could be worked to advantage, if they were not to be used for breeding purposes. In households men preferred Greeks or Egyptians as being more deft and more graceful, more adapted to the refinements of civilised life and society.

The bidding, therefore, finally languished. Senecio, one of the most dissolute and abandoned of the younger Romans, at last called to Phryx, the slave dealer, a degenerate Greek.

"We are tired of these sullen-faced, beetle-browed, impudent animals; of these big, thick-limbed, stupid, clumsy women, these draught horses and brood mares. If thou hast anything of value or price, bring it forward, otherwise we will go. Say I not well, gentlemen?"

"Well indeed," answered Vestinus.

"From the lips of folly fall words of wisdom," cried Pollio, who was as caustic as he was vicious.

"As for me," began Attilius, "I weary of the scene. I am going to the Forum. Pætus Thrasea makes a noble plea for a client this morning, I am told, and I would fain——"

"Wait, noble sirs," pleaded the slave dealer anxiously, "and thou especially, brave tribune."

Caius Attilius had been a frequent purchaser in the last few weeks and he was therefore treated with special consideration.

"I have something well worth your while," the villainous old rascal continued with insinuating suggestion. "I have reserved her for the last. It is a maid from wave washed Britain, with the sunlight of the island in her hair, the blue of the sea in her eyes, the grace of Atalanta in her limbs, the figure of Hebe, the face of Juno! I vow that——"

"By the goddesses he cites," cried Pollio, "our worthy trafficker in flesh and blood is turned poet."

"The sight of British Gwenna," returned the slave dealer cunningly, "would make a poet even of the bitterest cynic in all Rome. If it were not that I must make my profit I would reserve her for myself, sirs."

"And that combination," sneered Pollio, "would put poetry and harmony among the lost arts at once."

"Produce thy paragon without further discussion," said Attilius peremptorily, "and let us be gone."

For answer the slave dealer clapped his hands. Two attendants ran to the entrance of an inner apartment, drew aside a curtain, disappeared, and presently came back with a woman between them. She came unwillingly, with obvious reluctance, yet the grasp of the two Nubians who had been sent to fetch her allowed no hesitation on her part. The old Greek slave dealer had a fine eye for the dramatic. Hanging from the door was a deep curtain of Tyrian purple, a rich, royal shade of blue. The slave market of Phryx was the richest and most exclusive afforded by the city. The posts and lintel of the doorway were of white marble.

The Nubians, naked save for a loin cloth, were out-

"I have reserved her for the last. It is a maid from wave-washed Britain"

lined against the marble. The slave between them, with the curtain for a background, was vested in a short, immodest tunic of silver tissue which fell barely to her knees. The sunlight shone full upon her. She was the fairest woman that Attilius had ever looked upon. Her eyes were blue as the sea that washed the shores of her native island, and her hair was gold, shot with deeper tinges of rich, reddish brown. What of her white figure could be seen was exquisitely proportioned. She was a tall woman, taller than most of the Romans in the courtyard, and indeed, thought Attilius, who was above the medium height, she could look even at him with level brows. Her hands and arms and legs might have served as models for Praxiteles. Her feet, albeit not so small as those of the Roman women, were exquisite in their proportions, and the silver-laced sandals she wore accentuated their beauty. Here was no slender girl like the customary Greek or Egyptian offerings, but a woman, though a very young one, nobly and perfectly planned, just passing out of girlhood apparently. In spite of the carefully calculated and suggestive immodesty of her habit, she bore herself with an immense dignity, a disdain almost royal in spite of her youth and immaturity. Phryx had spared no pains in her adornment. Her tunic, sandals, and the binding of her hair were tissue of silver, and well served to enhance the appeal which he intended she should make.

As she was held upright between the slaves, confronting the people in the courtyard, colour flamed fiercely in her cheeks. She lifted her beautiful head haughtily,

and indomitable spirit shone in her eyes. A low murmur of approval came from the bystanders.

"She might be an Augusta," said one.

"She carrieth herself like a Roman," cried another.

"But few Roman women are so tall and so splendid," said a third.

"It is but a girl," remarked another, "but what promise of royal womanhood!"

"Said I not right, worthy gentlemen?" cried the slave dealer, rubbing his hands with joy.

"Right, indeed," answered Senecio. "Hath she been sold before, Phryx?"

"No, sirs," answered the slave dealer. "She was captured a few months since after the defeat of Boadicea, queen of the Iceni. Her father, who was killed in the battle, was a great noble among those barbarians. The centurion to whom she was awarded, knowing her value, protected her carefully. She cometh to you as pure as the snow upon the Alps."

"Thou hast not chalked her feet," observed Vestinus.

"What will you, sirs?" answered the slave dealer. "Should I desecrate a foot like that with yellow chalk? Nay, thou mayest take my word for it that she is what I say and for the first time offered for sale. There is not another slave dealer in Rome hath such a piece of merchandise as this."

"I believe thee," answered Pollio. "Put her on the block, strip off her tunic, and then we will see if what is hidden agreeth with what is visible. Meanwhile, I start the bidding with ten thousand sesterces."

"Ten thousand sesterces!" exclaimed the slave dealer, motioning to the Nubians. "Thou dost but jest, noble Pollio; for such a woman as this that price were almost an insult."

"Nevertheless, it is the bid I make in the beginning," answered the other calmly.

"I will make it fifteen," put in Senecio.

"Twenty!" cried out a third voice.

"Wait, gentlemen; wait until she is on the block," said the delighted old slave dealer.

The block was a huge stone about six feet square elevated a foot or two above the pavement. Although the unfortunate woman clenched her hands and stiffened her knees, she was rapidly forced across the courtyard and lifted unceremoniously upon the block and left there alone by the slaves.

"Now then, off with her tunic," cried Senecio, "and let us look at her as she is."

"Aye," cut in Pollio caustically, "clothes may conceal as many things as speech on occasion."

To remove that tunic was a privilege which the slave dealer reserved for himself in this instance. With the air of an Hyperides about to unveil a Phryne he walked to the stone platform and laid his hand upon the single garment the poor girl wore, protesting by all his vicious gods that in this case there was no defect to conceal as all these noble Roman gentlemen should soon see for themselves. The woman had not yet spoken a word, but it was quite evident that whether she understood the Latin language or not, she divined what was toward, for doubling her fist she struck the approaching slave

dealer a violent blow on the chest. He fell backward before the utterly unexpected thrust, but still retained for a moment his hold upon her garment. As he rolled over on the ground he tore the light silver tissue from her shoulder. Instantly the girl caught it with her hand, drew it together, and stood at bay, her bosom heaving, her breath coming short, her face pale, her eyes blazing. But that one glimpse of the naked shoulder had whetted all the base desires of the degenerate Romans.

"Off with the tunic," they cried in unison.

"To it again, Phryx," exclaimed Vestinus.

"Let not a woman master thee, O son of Achilles," sneered Pollio mockingly.

Presently, as the clamour died away, the object of all this persecution herself spoke, to the great surprise of all.

"Sirs," she began in a low, musical voice, speaking Latin with a charming accent, "I am the freeborn daughter of a prince of the Iceni. My father was killed in defence of our forest glades, following our unhappy Queen Boadicea in a combat against you Romans. By your gods, put not this shame upon me. Have pity."

"Pity!" laughed Senecio. "Pity in the slave market!"

"Thou baggage, strip off thy tunic," growled the angry slave dealer, who had by this time struggled to his feet, raising his hand threateningly as he spoke, and making ready to step upon the block again and complete his task.

"Stop!" cried Attilius in a voice of thunder "Lay not thine hand upon her, Phryx, or thou shalt feel the weight of mine."

"Thou art a fortunate maid, if maid indeed thou art," said Vestinus with bitter jibe, approaching the block more closely. "Thine appeal hath raised thee up a defender already."

"Defender or not," protested Pollio, "the girl is yet for sale. No one hath bought her. Off with her tunic, Phryx, and if, as I think, she proveth as fair as she seemeth, I offer thee forty thousand sesterces for her."

The woman recoiled to the edge of the platform and clenched her hands once more. There was that furious intent and purpose in the gaze she cast upon him that caused the slave dealer to pause uneasily.

"Give her a sword," laughed Cotta, "and she will fight like a gladiator."

"Is there no one here," cried the woman desperately, "who will have mercy?"

She looked about at the faces of the laughing, admiring Romans, yet in their laughter was contempt and in their admiration contamination. Finally her glance rested upon the face of Attilius. She thought she detected there some gleam of human interest, some evidence of compassion. It was he who had prevented the slave dealer from striking her. He was her only chance, her last hope. What could she do? Something moved her. She unclenched her fingers, lifted her hand, and made a little movement in the air. Only those who had seen it before could tell what outline

her white fingers traced, but Attilius recognised it on the instant. He turned to Regulus, who had stood at his side silent, it not being his place to interfere with the amusements of these dissolute youths.

"Sawest thou the sign of Paulus and Lucas?" whispered Attilius.

"Aye," answered Regulus, "she made the outline of a fish."

"It is enough," said the young tribune firmly.

He had stood in the background. Now he thrust himself through the others and came to the edge of the platform on which she stood.

"I offer thee fifty thousand sesterces for the maiden," he said quietly.

"For a soldier," said Senecio, "thou hast a nice taste in human flesh. Unveil her, Phryx, and I offer thee fifty-five."

"Sixty," said Attilius quietly.

"Seventy," cried Pollio.

"This transaction calleth for immediate payment, gentlemen," interrupted Phryx rather anxiously, looking at the bidders.

"One hundred thousand sesterces," said Attilius with a stamp of his foot.

The woman, perfectly comprehending everything, sank to her knees and buried her face in her hands, forgetful of the tear in the tunic, which fell low over her shoulder, exposing its purity and beauty. The large price offered by the tribune settled the matter. None could overbid him, especially as the payment had to be made immediately.

"She prayeth," jeered Senecio. "I want no priestess save of Venus."

"She fighteth," sneered Pollio. "I seek no fiery mænad."

"She hath a bad temper," scoffed Vestinus. "I have ever avoided a virago."

"I would not have her on any account," laughed Cotta. "She is of too high a spirit for my humble household."

"They do but jest, sir," argued the slave dealer anxiously to Attilius. "They are consumed with envy. Thou wilt not withdraw from the bargain?"

"Enough," said Attilius with unusual haughtiness. He was somewhat ashamed of himself. He could scarcely afford the price and he had no use for the woman. But for the sign of the fish—— He put down these disquieting thoughts. "I hold to mine offer."

"She is thine, worthy sir, and a great bargain. As thou hast been so generous thou mayest choose freely another from the huddle yonder to accompany her."

"Regulus," said Attilius, "go thou and take what thou wilt yonder as a gift from me."

"Be pleased to step down from the block, lady," said the slave dealer obsequiously, bowing low to the young woman.

She had now become the property of the noble Caius Attilius, and was hereafter to be treated with some of the deference due the young patrician, if for nothing else, which fully accounted for the sudden and radical change in manner of old Phryx.

"Well," said Senecio rashly, "I wish thee joy of thy bargain. Thou hast——"

"Silence, Senecio!" thundered Attilius. "The woman now is mine, my property, and I will allow no man to disparage her under penalty of the forfeiture of my friendship. Would any of you incur my enmity?"

He towered among these young men as the woman had towered among the slaves. None of them cared to encounter Attilius in that peremptory and somewhat terrifying mood.

"I did but jest," said Senecio lightly, endeavouring to pass it off indifferently.

"I like not jests about my slaves," said Attilius. "Woman," he turned toward her, "speakest thou our Roman tongue?"

The girl nodded breathlessly. There was something intensely likable in the young man who had bought her, she thought, and in any case her condition could not be worse than on the block a few moments before. She regarded him with deep interest and heartfelt gratitude.

"Fear nothing," continued the tribune. "Serve me faithfully and thou shalt be well entreated. Give her a cloak," he commanded, turning to some of his clients who had stood in the background watching the bidding while waiting the pleasure of their lord. "Wrap it about her shoulders and convey her home. She cannot be left unguarded. Give her to Pheidippides and bid him treat her kindly until I return and advise him of what disposition I wish made of her. And thou, Phryx,

bring me paper and a reed and I will write thee an order upon my bankers in the Forum of Augustus for thy purchase money."

"It shall be done, sir. And hath the worthy centurion chosen?"

"That I have," answered Regulus. "Here is a sturdy man, who hath been, if I mistake not, a soldier. I need such a man about me."

"What, Regulus!" laughed Pollio. "With all the women of Britain at thy command thou choosest that hard-faced villain!"

"I have been a soldier for forty years, young sir, and I have had my share of fighting. I want no women. My choice satisfieth me and I am the one to be pleased," returned the centurion with his usual calmness.

"Thou art indeed, worthy primipilus," said Vestinus, laughing.

"Sirs," said Attilius, who had finished writing the order, which he handed to Phryx, "I have had enough of the slave market. I am for the Forum; do ye go that way?"

"I go," answered Vestinus.

"And I, too," chimed in Senecio.

"We will all go," added Cotta, "unless perchance thou hast another woman for sale, like the one just bought, within thy secret chambers, Phryx."

"Alas, no, gentlemen," answered the slave dealer, "but I am expecting another shipload within the week, and, the gods favouring us, we may hap upon such a prize again."

"In which event thou wilt let us know?"

"Assuredly, sirs."

"Take it not ill that I mocked thee, Attilius," said Senecio as they stepped toward the entrance, "but I will make it up to thee with a word of advice. If thou valuest thy prize, let her not be seen of Cæsar."

"I shall know how to keep mine own," said Attilius proudly, turning away.

He was not to get off without a further episode, however, for the woman he had bought suddenly turned to him, and before he could prevent it she knelt at his feet, seized his hand, and kissed it.

"May Christus reward thee, noble sir," she said.

Attilius looked at her in some amazement as she rose to her feet, turned, and, accompanied by several of his clients, who treated her with all deference, went out into the streets.

"The girl cometh to thy hand already, thou hast conquered her!" said Vestinus enviously. "I am half sorry that I did not overbid thee while she was on the block."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE DOMUS OF ATTILIUS

It was late in the afternoon before Caius Attilius returned to his home on the crest of the Aventine Hill. Ordinarily he found his chief interest in life outside of his domus, but in this instance he was rather glad when the doorkeeper turned the huge door of the vestibulum on its pivot, and, with obsequious bows and wordy welcome, ushered him into the atrium. He had bidden his friends farewell, dismissed his clients, and had given his personal attendants—slaves, that is—a brief holiday as he left the Forum, whence he had returned home alone, declining several pressing invitations on the plea of other engagements. Even Regulus did not accompany him. He had fallen in with some congenial old army companions and would not be in until late at night. Other engagements the tribune had none, but, truth to tell, he was anxious to see again and to learn something further of his lovely purchase of the morning.

He had been so long away from Rome and society that the constant and officious attention of his numerous slaves somewhat annoyed him, and he was yet a little self-conscious in their presence. He had so long and so largely shifted for himself in camp that he could not quickly or easily get used to so much personal service and attention. Consequently, instead of at once summoning to his presence the British girl he had

bought, when he entered the atrium and had been divested of his cloak and toga, he put the matter by after inquiring and being told that she had been brought home that morning and was awaiting his pleasure in the women's section of the slave quarters on the other side of the garden back of the peristyle.

His bath, his dinner, an hour passed in his library with a reader who was to brush up his acquaintance with the much neglected poets and philosophers, about whose works he had grown somewhat rusty in his years of campaigning, served to pass the time until evening. The night had fallen, and the lamps, filled with perfumed oil and swinging on the tall, many-branched candelabra, were lighted when at last he returned to the atrium, seated himself upon a handsome chair of citron wood inlaid with silver, one of his recent purchases, which was placed on a thick carpet from Persia, spoil of a campaign, and bade his freedman and major-domo, Pheidippides, send the new slave into his presence.

Now Attilius had, of course, been brought into social association with women of high birth and good breeding in Rome, in Egypt, and in other parts of the world where he had served. Since his return he had been a welcome guest at the private table of some of the first families of the city, and a certain Lollia of the ancient house of Claudii had greatly impressed him. He could not be said to be in love with her, and yet, as she was one of the most eligible women in Rome from his point of view, and as matrimonial suggestions had been made by friends, he had already considered her in the light of a possible mistress of his household.

He knew little about Lollia Claudia, and no one had yet thought it worth while to enlighten his ignorance. To him she seemed everything that a well-conducted, well brought up Roman maid ought to be; but in spite of her demure air and modest bearing she belonged to the fastest and most reckless set of young Roman womanhood. Caius Attilius was not an unworthy suitor for any Roman maiden; his wealth, the fact that he was the last representative of the Attilii, a senatorial family of established dignity, worth, and credit; his handsome person, coupled with a certain manly frankness and soldierly vigour, which was most attractive to a woman satiated with the blasé, effeminate, and dissolute Roman youth, inclined Lollia to look favourably upon him. And there were other reasons as well.

Yet the sight of Lollia never moved Attilius so much as the prospect of seeing this young Briton whom he had just purchased at so high a price. He leaned forward a little, sat with his elbows on the arms of the chair, his chin resting upon his hands, thinking for a few moments. Presently he lifted his head, and there before him stood the woman, habited exactly as when she had been placed on the block in the morning. She had begged for other garments, but Attilius had given no orders, and other vesture had not been provided yet.

The tribune stared at her in some amazement; her presence gave him a certain little shock. She had not been announced, and she had come in silently. Then he had not expected to see her so beautiful in her strange, un-Roman way. He had thought her fair in the courtyard of the slave dealer. She was no less fair

in the soft light cast by the perfumed lamps which filled the atrium with their mild radiance and diffused a rich fragrance in the warm air. Caius Attilius was as yet above the ordinary feeling of the young Roman patrician for his slaves; the thing which he thought was love in his heart for Lollia kept him true, for the time being, to the ideal of womanhood which she represented to him. The being who stood before him was absolutely in his power, she was his to do as he liked with, yet the thought of harming her did not enter his mind for a single moment.

He rather felt compassion for her as she stood there. While he now recognised in full her beauty and grace and charm, he took an æsthetic pleasure in their contemplation. And to that was added an utterly un-Roman pity for this forlorn and helpless captive. Caius Attilius might even have set the poor girl free, but that would have deprived her of the protection of his household and was not to be thought of. Such as she alone in Rome would have been the prey of any young patrician who might choose to lay his hand on her. It was far, far better, did she but know it, that she should be his slave and in his household, so long as he continued in his present mind, than almost any one else's captive.

The steady scrutiny, not to say stare, of the young Roman at last brought a slow blush to the face of the young woman.

"Thou hast summoned me," she began, and there was nothing cringing or servile in her tone; it was rather that of an equal addressing an equal, "and I am here."

"Yes," said Attilius, "as I have paid a great price for thee," he went on, quite unconscious of his unintentional hurt to her feelings, "I should like to know something about thee."

"I am, as I told thee," answered the girl simply and unequivocally, "the daughter of a great chief of the Iceni in the island of Britain. My mother was an Æduan of Transalpine Gaul. We lived for a long time at Massilia, and there I learned to speak Latin. Indeed, I was born there, and thy language is more familiar to me than my native tongue. My father owned ships and traded between Britain and Gaul. When he was older he went back to Britain. In the last war my father was slain, scarcely six months ago, and my brothers, too. My mother had died years before, and I was left alone. You Romans beat us in the field, took our camp; I fought with the other women, but in vain. I was seized, sold into slavery, brought to the market of Phryx, and thou didst buy me this morning. I am here alone and helpless, I would say at thy mercy, but it is a quality not known in Rome," she concluded bitterly and with injustice, forgetting apparently what Attilius had done for her.

"Thou speakest boldly, British woman," said Attilius, frowning as he noted her forgetfulness.

"And why should I not, Roman man? I am free-born, the daughter of a great chief. I was not destined to be any man's slave,—much less thine."

"The fortune that hath brought thee low, the gods——"

"The gods," said the woman bitterly. "There is

no power divine that overrules the world. The mastery of it is in human hands. It is a world upheld by human swords, and those blades are in Roman hands, I think."

"Thou art a philosopher, maiden."

"I have learned that philosophy in the bitter school of life."

"Am I right to call thee maiden?" asked Attilius suddenly.

"Thou art right."

"And the proof?"

"I am here."

"That answer is worthy of a Roman."

"And dost thou think that virtue which will not survive shame the peculiar property of thy Roman people?"

"I confess," said Attilius, smiling—and when he smiled, disclosing his white teeth, his dark face grew strangely attractive—"that I had not given the matter of virtue or the lack of it in other peoples much thought."

"A Roman answer," said the girl sharply. "With ye all, it is Rome first, and the rest of the world is nothing."

"Indeed, thou sayest truly, for, after all, what is the rest of the world? The nations are but stepping-stones upon which we rise to greater dominion."

"And I am a broken fragment of one of these stepping-stones." She threw up her arms. "Some day, as we have fallen, Rome shall fall," she added with the face and bearing of a prophetess.

"Mayhap," said Attilius carelessly. "I believe nothing is eternal."

"Not even Rome?"

"Not even Rome, yet it will last our time doubtless. But our discourse hath carried us far. I am a plain, blunt soldier; such matters are beyond me. I sent not for thee to discuss them. What I shall do with thee is a problem which presseth upon me more heavily and demandeth solution now."

"As thou hast bought me and as I have become thy chattel by thy cruel law, I have neither part nor lot in such a discussion," said the woman bitterly.

"Aye, 'the will of the master is as the will of the gods,' for the slave," quoted the tribune thoughtfully.

"And though there are no gods the master is a reality," answered the woman. "What dost thou decide for me?"

She threw out her hands as she spoke and stood very erect before him, very proud, haughty, and independent in face and bearing. He stared at her in growing perplexity.

"I scarce know what to do with thee," he admitted at last, "though I dare say the question would not long or greatly puzzle my friends. Canst thou sing, or play upon the cithara, or dance?"

"How can I sing the songs of home in a strange land, and to what music should I address myself in servitude? To dance is the expression of a joyful heart! Have I that?"

"What is thy name?" irrelevantly asked Attilius,

suddenly reflecting that he had not yet been informed of it.

"Gwenna."

"Gwenna," said the patrician, "only a bitter heart—for which I can scarcely blame thee—would bring such bitter words to thy lips. I mean thee no harm. Thou shalt be treated kindly."

"Kindness from a Roman?"

"Even so, and perhaps in days to come thou wilt be thankful that thou hast fallen to me rather than become the slave of Senecio or Pollio or any of the others—the men who would fain have bought thee and who would have stripped thee of thy raiment, from which humiliation I saved thee, thou mayest remember. And so perhaps some day thou wilt dance and sing and play for me—with joy."

He stopped and smiled at her, and as he smiled his usually stern countenance was greatly changed. It almost seemed kindly for the moment. There was a pleasant humour about it, and where there is humour gentler qualities are apt to accompany it. Even the poor, prejudiced, resentful captive admitted that in her heart.

These words affected the woman strangely. They brought back to her all that she had escaped. A warm wave of colour at the thought of the outrage that had almost been put upon her, that she would have suffered but for this man—her owner—flooded her whole body. She suddenly sank to her knees before him, seized his hand, and, as she had done in the slave market of Phryx, kissed it passionately, while her tears fell upon

it. Attilius, manlike, hated scenes; he did not care particularly to have his hand kissed, but the soft pressure of this woman's lips affected him most strangely. He suffered the homage without question, finding it by no means unpleasant.

"My lord," said the woman, looking up at him with wet eyes, "I had forgot what thou hast done for me in the contemplation of the misery of my present lot. Thou hast saved not only my honour and my modesty" —and at the time it did not seem strange to Attilius that a captured British slave girl should talk to him about her honour and modesty—"but thou hast saved my life as well, for had they succeeded in stripping me of my tunic, I had snatched a dagger from one of the slaves and stabbed myself before their eyes."

"And doth life mean so little to thee?"

"I am young, my lord, and fair, men say, but because I am fair I have been preserved while others of my people have suffered ignominy unspeakable. Life six months ago was full of promise for me, but now for what have I to hope? Thou seemest kind; thy house is beautiful, but it is a prison. Thou art my master and I am thy slave. For what purpose didst thou buy me?"

"For no purpose," answered Attilius frankly. "I saw thy hand move in the air; thou madest a sign——"

"The fish!" exclaimed the woman.

"I recognised it."

"Art thou a Christian?"

"Am I a Jew, woman?" cried Attilius, rising to his feet in some displeasure.

"Nay, master," protested the girl, rising also and extending her hand as if to ward off a blow, "I meant no harm, but I am not of that strange Hebrew race either, and——"

"Art thou a Christian?"

"No."

"Why that sign then?"

"On the ship that brought me hither there was an old man skilled in medicine, his life forfeit save for his knowledge. He was from the Far East, but had been sold into slavery. He taught me something of this strange new religion, that they worship one Christus whom you Romans crucified, who, they say, rose from the dead, and doth live among the gods, the gods in which I do not believe."

"But the sign?"

"The old man knew what lay before me, and told me when I was in the direst trouble to make that sign of the fish and perhaps some one might help me."

"Knowest thou what it meaneth?"

The woman shook her head.

"I know not, and yet it must have potency since it called thee to my assistance and saved me for the time at any rate."

"Strange," mused Attilius.

"Knowest thou its meaning, lord?" she asked in turn.

"No more than thyself," was the prompt and quite unexpected answer. "It was disclosed to me by one who rendered me great service, with the prayer that I should help, when I could, those who made it."

"Perhaps," said the woman slowly, great awe in her face, "there may be gods and this Christus may be one of them."

Attilius laughed somewhat scornfully.

"When thou hast lived longer and hast gained wisdom and experience to match thy beauty thou wilt be more convinced than ever that there are no gods, and that there is no hereafter. We must live while we live and enjoy the day; there is no other. But it groweth late. Thou art weary and shouldst rest. Canst thou read our Latin tongue as well as speak it?"

"Yes."

"I will have thee taught Greek, too, then. Thou shalt take the place of my lector, who hath a harsh voice and groweth old. Meanwhile thou shalt be my vestiplica and help me don my toga, draping it so that it may fall with grace and dignity. At table thou shalt stand behind me and serve me at my pleasure."

"Thou hast saved me," said the girl, forcing a certain docility into her voice, "from the greatest peril. I will try to serve thee faithfully in whatever thou mayest command."

"I will see that thou art protected. When I marry, thou shalt attend the noble lady who will become the domina of this, my familia. For the rest——" He clapped his hands and a messenger entered. "Send me old Lais," he added.

In a short time the ancient Greek woman, who now had charge of the women slaves of the household, appeared before him.

"This is Gwenna of Britain, Lais," said Attilius.

"See her housed safely for the night. She is to be my vestiplica, and old Eurotas, the philosopher, is to teach her Greek. See that she be kindly treated and not molested. On thy head——"

"Lord, it shall be as thou dost command," said the old woman, bowing low. "Come with me, British Gwenna," she continued.

The two turned and walked to the door.

"Thou art a fortunate girl," whispered Lais, as they went down the passage. "Thou hast fallen to the kindest master in all Rome."

"That I should call any man master in Rome or elsewhere is intolerable," flashed out the younger woman.

Long time that night Caius Attilius thought of his new and interesting slave, that British Gwenna, and when at last he fell asleep he even dreamed of her!

CHAPTER VIII

THE MESSAGE FROM CÆSAR

Caius Attilius highly appreciated the unwonted luxury of sleeping late. It was a habit which he had acquired during his convalescence and which, somewhat to his surprise, for he had been a hardy soldier indeed and accustomed to little sleep, he found himself enjoying greatly. Therefore, he had barely finished his breakfast, although the hour was late, when a messenger from the imperial court was announced. This messenger, when ushered into the atrium, proved to be a minor freedman of the Emperor's. He was attended by a number of slaves and was sufficiently imposing in dress and bearing, as befitted his position as one of the mouthpieces of the Cæsar.

Attilius did not recognise the man. He did not know who or what he was, and he did not greatly care. The tribune had been so long away at the wars that he was not familiar with the officers of the court, and as he himself was of a senatorial family of immense antiquity and dignity, which had furnished many consuls to the Republic and rendered much important service to the state, he received the messenger seated, which was not particularly pleasing to the pompous and self-important freedman. Even senators, in the degenerate days which had come upon that body, were not ashamed to treat with extraordinary respect and complaisance

these base-born men whom the Emperor favoured and dignified. Attilius did not like freedmen in general, especially when they were arrogant and presumptuous as this one in particular. With a coolness and a haughtiness, therefore, which he scarcely ever manifested even to his slaves, the young patrician received Nero's agent.

"The divine Emperor," began the freedman, insolently resentful, "whom his fellow-gods ever cherish, and whose voice I am, hath returned last night from Naples. He summoneth thee to audience this morning at the fourth hour. Thou art commanded to bring with thee the centurion, Regulus, and give an accounting of the treasure committed to thy charge in the *Isis*, which ship Cæsar hath heard, with feelings of regret, hath been lost at sea while in thy command."

"Say to Cæsar, whom the gods preserve," said Attilius curtly, his face flushing at the presumption implied by the bold words of the freedman, "that I shall be there with the primipilus of the Fourteenth Legion to make such account of my trust as is proper. For the rest thou art not thy master, and thy manner and speech are not pleasing to me. Farewell."

Being thus rather unceremoniously given his dismissal, the freedman, after a venomous look at the tribune, whom he would fain have answered impertinently, but did not yet dare, turned, and followed by his attendants, disappeared through the vestibule into the street. He murmured to his chiefest and most sympathetic confidant, as he did so, that a longer sojourn in the city would probably tame the haughty spirit of the proud

Roman. He ought to be made to feel that even a freedman had influence with his master and that those who were dignified by the favour of Nero had a greatness and a power against which no long descent or ancient family could be measured for a moment!

Left alone Caius Attilius clapped his hands. Instantly a young slave who acted as page entered the atrium.

"Send me Lais."

"Yes, master."

"And bid her hasten."

In a few moments the mistress of the women slaves hurriedly made her appearance.

"Greetings, lord," she began, bowing low before him and yet smiling kindly upon him.

She had occupied the same position in the household of his father and mother, and had known him from a child. She was in some sort a foster-mother to him.

"Greetings, Lais," said Attilius, smiling upon her with a very different mien from that he had exhibited toward the freedman. "I called thee to inquire as to the welfare of British Gwenna, the slave whom I entrusted to thy care last night."

The eyes of old Lais opened a little wider at this extraordinary and unusual inquiry as to the welfare of a slave. Such concern was not expected from a master who usually troubled himself very little about such things. All sorts of ideas flashed into the old woman's mind, none of which could be said to be justified by the real state of affairs as yet.

"She was so lonely and miserable, master," answered Lais, "that I took her into my own cubicle for the night."

"Doth she seem happier this morning?"

"This morning, master, happily she maketh no complaint."

"That is well. Bring her to me, and bid her hasten. As thou goest through the hall send hither the boy in attendance also."

When the youngster presented himself Caius Attilius bade him awaken the old centurion, who, having spent the greater part of the night carousing with some old comrades recently returned from the army in Gaul, had not yet arisen.

"Tell him," said the tribune, "that we are summoned to Nero's court to make an accounting for our lost ship. Bid him bring the jewels from the treasure-chest in his chamber." As he spoke he glanced at the clepsydra, or water-clock, over against the wall. "It is now past the third hour," he added, "and our audience is set for the fourth. He knoweth it is not well to be behind time with Cæsar, and therefore will make speed. Tell Eurotas to be in attendance in the hall and await my summons hither, and thereafter let me not be disturbed until I call."

By the time these directions had been communicated to the messenger the hangings parted and the girl, followed by old Lais, entered the atrium. In her youth the Greek woman had been beautiful, with the classic regularity of feature of her race, and with her white hair and kindly face she was not uncomely now. She

made an excellent foil for the splendid young barbarian who stood by her side.

"Master," said Lais, bowing low and stepping backward, "the maid is here at thy pleasure."

"Hast thou no word of greeting for me this morning, British Gwenna?" said Attilius, smiling, and when he smiled again the woman noticed with pleasure characteristically feminine how white his teeth were and how pleasant his stern expression became.

"How should the slave greet her master?" she answered.

"With a smile, maiden, lest tears should be imposed upon her," said the tribune.

"Can the freeborn laugh in slavery?"

"That I know not," answered Attilius, "never having been a slave."

"Shall I withdraw and leave you alone?" queried Lais softly.

"Nay, what I have to say concerns you both. British Gwenna, I entrust thee to the care of Lais, who hath been in my household since she was a girl, younger even than thou art. She was woman grown when I was a little boy. Long since she should have been freed from bondage but that she willed it otherwise herself."

"Here have I lived," said Lais, "in peace and comfort; here I am happy and content; I know no other home; I want no other; here, if it be thy pleasure and the gods', when the time comes, I shall die in peace."

"May that day long be deferred, good mother," said Attilius, smiling at her fondly. "Do thou take

full charge of Gwenna. She is to be my vestiplica. Thou knowest Latin, maiden, but Greek?"

"I cannot speak it," answered Gwenna, "although I can manage to spell out a little of it."

"Thou hast been well taught, it seemeth," said Attilius. "There is music in thy voice. I am a rough soldier and have forgot much that I learned in youth. It is the fashion to study the philosophers and history, and I would fain be in the fashion. I will have thee taught to read in Greek the works of the great poets, philosophers, and historians, and when thou hast learned thou shalt be my reader also. My domestic philosopher groweth old. He hath a cracked voice and nods over the roll. Thou shalt read to me."

Gwenna looked at him without speaking as he paused, evidently expecting some evidence of pleasure or gratitude from her.

"Doth not that prospect please thee?" he asked presently in some disappointment.

"As well, perhaps, as anything could please me, being, as I am, a slave."

"Thou mayest grow to love thy slavery as yonder Lais."

"Never."

"Some day I may even take thee to the prætor——"

"And set me free?" she interrupted eagerly.

"It is not impossible," answered Attilius, "but not now."

"What wouldst thou do with thy freedom, girl?" asked old Regulus, who had come in unannounced and had heard the last part of the colloquy.

Gwenna turned and faced him.

"I know not," she answered, "unless I could return to Britain and——"

"Greeting, worthy centurion," said the tribune. "I did not hear thee enter."

"Greeting, noble Attilius," rejoined the old soldier. "Thou hast pleasant occupation to excuse thy failure to notice me.—Why, maiden," continued Regulus, after this interchange of courtesy, "thy safety lieth within these walls. Once on the streets, alone, free, thou wouldst be as helpless as a lamb among a pack of wolves. The first human beast with a purple stripe down his tunic that met thee would gobble thee up."

"Regulus speaketh truly," said Attilius. "Here thou wilt be protected and cared for, and in time thou mayest be happy."

"It is not home, it is not freedom," persisted the girl stubbornly.

"Enough," answered Attilius shortly. He did not like to be confronted by a will so unyielding. His rank, his station, to say nothing of his military position, ill fitted him to brook opposition. "Eurotas!"

"Worthy patron, here," said a venerable Greek, appearing from the hall where he had been waiting a summons.

"This maiden's education is in thy care, learned philosopher. She speaketh and readeth our own Latin tongue and she hath some slight knowledge of Greek. I give her into thy hands for further training. She is to be taught to read Homer and your philosophers and poets. Upon thee and Lais I particularly lay the

charge of teaching her. And, Lais, see that the gaudy silver tunic she weareth be laid aside at once and that she be habited in attire more suited to her modesty."

"Shall she wear the uniform of the other slave women?" asked Lais, who was herself exempted from the distinctive dress of servitude.

The girl, blushing deeply at the thought of the short, scanty garment she wore, which she had almost forgot in the greater matters towards, took a step forward. She smote her hands together softly and extended them beseechingly toward her new master. Must even her clothing remind her of her state?

"Dress her as thou wilt, but becomingly," said Attilius, well understanding what was in her mind. "A garment like thine perhaps and of blue, for she is fair. And now thou art dismissed."

But Gwenna stepped nearer, her hands still extended, and opened her mouth to speak.

"Didst thou not hear? Thou art dismissed," said Caius Attilius sternly, whereat the girl shrank back, her cheeks paling, and turned away with Lais.

"He is the kindest master in all Italy," whispered the elder woman to the younger as they withdrew, "but even he must not be crossed. Thou hast won his favour. I never knew him to show so much consideration to a slave and thou shouldst be grateful."

"I only meant to express that gratitude," explained the girl humbly enough. "I know that he might have treated me differently, and I am thankful. I would have said so, that was all."

"Thou canst show thy gratitude best," said the woman as the two passed into the garden back of the peristyle on their way to the slave quarters, "by studying to please him. There is not one in the house who would not give her head to be vestiplica; and to be reader, as thou shalt be when thou hast learned, is beyond their veriest dream. But question not thy master, and go when he bids thee; that is best."

"That pretty maiden needeth lessons," said old Regulus back in the atrium.

"She hath not become accustomed to her slavery," answered Attilius.

"Not yet."

"But for that I can scarcely blame her," the tribune continued. "Would anything ever accustom us to slavery?"

"We are Romans," answered Regulus calmly, as if that settled the matter, as indeed it did.

"True, worthy centurion," smiled Attilius, thoroughly agreeing. "But knowest thou that we are summoned to the court? Art ready?"

"Ready as always."

"Hast thou the jewels?"

"Beneath my cloak, here."

The primipilus was dressed in his best armour, but without his sword, which was not worn at imperial audiences, and his newest military cloak hung from his broad shoulders. He opened it and disclosed a stout leather bag in his clenched hand.

"Shall we go in a litter or walk?"

"Litters are for the elderly and feeble, and for

women and the Emperor," answered Regulus promptly. "A veteran like myself goeth on his own two legs according to his wont."

"I am still hardy enough to walk with thee," assented the tribune.

"Greetings, sirs," said Pheidippides, the worthy old freedman who acted as major-domo, who at that moment entered the atrium. "A number of thy clients have waited for thee in the vestibule yonder since early morning."

"Have they breakfasted?"

"Thinking that it would be thy pleasure, I admitted them early to a modest repast."

"Thou hast done well. And have they received their customary basket gifts for the day?"

"They have, lord."

"Bid them attend me to the Palatine," answered Attilius. "Fetch me my toga and send some one to assist me."

"Let that service be mine," said old Lais, re-entering the hall. "Mine eyes are dim and my fingers tremble, but I have performed the service often enough for thee and for thy father before thee to try it yet once again."

"Where didst thou leave thy charge?"

"With Eurotas, master. I came back to receive thy further commands."

"I have none."

"And to say to thee that what the maiden would have said to thee when thou didst dismiss her was but to express her gratitude for all thy kindness."

"And that is well," said Attilius, submitting to the draping. "How hangeth my toga, Regulus?"

"I am no great judge of the matter," answered the centurion, scanning the young patrician, "but it seemeth to me to be well enough, like the man who weareth it, even for Cæsar."

"Do thou cause the clients again to be admitted, Pheidippides," said the tribune, smiling at the blunt, but undeniable compliment in his friend's rough words.

Attilius had been but a short time in Rome, but many of the former clients of his father had already found him out, and the atrium was soon filled with a body of that class of toga-ed Romans who possessed the citizenship and little else and who lived upon the charity of wealthy patricians, to whom in turn they rendered such service in the way of personal attendance and companionship when they walked abroad, as well as supported and countenanced them should they run for office, or read a play in public, or plead a cause, or deliver an oration in the Forum. As usual they were a sorry-looking lot, although they bore themselves with all the pride of their Roman citizenship. Under their togas they carried little baskets that morning filled with food by the orders of Pheidippides, to which a small coin or two had been added for a draught of cheap wine—a customary daily dole upon which they lived.

"Greeting, noble Attilius," burst from the lips of one and another until the atrium was filled with sound.

"Greeting, worthy friends," returned the young patrician courteously. "I am summoned to an audi-

ence with the Emperor at the fourth hour, and I beg you to attend me there."

"It is a pleasure," answered one who seemed to be the spokesman of the clients, "to attend the noble Caius Attilius abroad on any business, but when he is summoned to receive the favour of Cæsar every client of his ancient house rejoices."

"I thank you," returned the tribune.

"Will the noble Attilius be borne in his litter or go afoot?" asked Pheidippides.

"Afoot," answered Attilius, laying his hand fondly upon the broad shoulder of old Regulus. "Afoot, with my comrade here, as becometh two veteran soldiers."

CHAPTER IX

NERO AND HIS SONG

As near as might be, when he judged that the hour of ten would be indicated by the water-clock in his house, for the Romans possessed no portable timepieces, Caius Attilius, with Regulus and the clients, stopped before the door of what the Emperor loved to call his "Transitory House" on the Palatine. A group of pretorians, at whose resplendent armour, embossed with silver and glowing with colour from their plumed helmets to their sandals, Regulus looked with the contempt of a real veteran, barred their way as was proper. Attilius promptly gave his name, and indicated that he had been summoned to the palace by the Cæsar himself. A call for the decurion in charge of the maniple, or squad of ten, posted at the front entrance gate, promptly brought that functionary forward, and he relieved the situation.

In attendance at this gateway in the walls was a minor freedman, who had a tablet on which were inscribed the names of those who had the privilege of entrance that morning. To find and check off the names of Caius Attilius and Regulus was the work of a few moments. Attended by the clients, they accordingly entered the courtyard surrounding the palace, where the clients were bidden to remain while the tribune

and the centurion were ushered into the great atrium of the building itself.

They were not alone that morning, for the spacious hall of audience was filled with people; the greater number being senators, their rank indicated by a broad purple stripe that ran down the front of the tunic and was seen where the under garment was exposed by the toga, and knights, distinguished by two narrower stripes in the same position. In addition there were freedmen, soldiers, civic officials, magistrates, a motley assemblage, indicative of the social strata into which Rome was divided, for in one far corner were even huddled a rather forlorn deputation of the common people, who had come to present a petition to the Imperator. Mingled with them all were the ever passing slaves busy about various errands.

Caius Attilius and Regulus were expected, evidently, for they had scarcely joined the throng when the hangings at the rear of the atrium, imperial purple by the way, were thrown apart and a nomenclator, or announcer, called out their names. As they stepped forward, he beckoned to them and they followed him through the hangings, down the long passageway, and into the peristyle beyond.

Lolling upon a carved ivory chair inlaid with silver and cushioned with purple, which was raised above the floor of the peristyle on a low dais, the Emperor awaited them. He was surrounded by a squad of pretorians in the same resplendent armour and equipment as was worn by those at the gate, and as he was consul himself at that time, his lictors, with their bundles of rods out

of which the axe projected, were also in attendance. Near him stood a richly dressed and armoured officer, a tall, dark man whose black locks and swarthy countenance were an excellent foil to the ruddy complexion, reddish-blond hair, and blue eyes of the Emperor. Other dandies of the court were grouped about, but a little removed from the royal vicinity. Close at hand and within call were scribes, secretaries, and freedmen, richly vested knights and senators, and others of the so-called friends of Cæsar.

The lovely and extensive garden, the grassy expanse of which was enclosed on three sides by the many-columned peristyle, was rich with gorgeous blossoms and diversified with many trees. A fountain occupied the centre of the enclosure. The part where the Emperor sat was shaded from the sun, which was already quite high, by projecting awnings of purple with poles and ropes of silver.

The nomenclator stepped within the entrance, bowed almost to the ground, and in stentorian tones—he had been chosen for the position because of his great voice—announced:

"The noble Caius Attilius, Tribune, and the worthy Regulus, Primipilus, of the Fourteenth, the Thundering Legion, from Egypt, and now in attendance upon the divine Emperor at his command."

As the shout died away Nero, who appeared to be in a rare good humour, gave evidence of his pleasure at the sight of these two by an unusual act of condescension. He rose from his seat and took a step or two in the direction of the approaching pair. He was

some distance away, and Caius Attilius, who looked at him with the trained eye of a soldier, had time to take him in as they approached each other.

The tribune had been away from Rome during the whole course of Nero's reign; the Emperor Claudius had not partaken of the poisoned mushrooms when the young patrician had departed for Egypt with the Fourteenth Legion. He had seen Nero as a boy, and had often played with him and the young Prince Britannicus in those days, but he had never laid eyes on him since he had become Cæsar, although he had enjoyed that position now for nearly half a score of years.

The handsome, attractive boy he remembered, so Caius Attilius thought, had not developed accordingly. His manhood had not fulfilled the promise of his youth. He saw before him a man rather above the middle stature with a face half good and half bad. For instance, he noted a weak, cruel, ineffably sensual mouth, puckered and pouting. His pale, unhealthy complexion was already stamped unmistakably by his continued indulgence in every kind of vice. Only the broad and noble brow crowned by masses of bright and beautifully curly hair in any degree matched the position of the man. The good features were spoiled by a pair of blinking blue eyes from which the fire and clarity of youth had long since faded, much increasing the near-sightedness of the man: a fact which was painfully apparent even though he had as then not peered at the tribune through a huge emerald which served him as an eyeglass.

As a boy, Nero had been slender and graceful. He

was now clad in a loose, flowing, uncinctured, effeminate robe of purple silk, embroidered in gold, which fell almost to his gold-laced sandals. This garment, entirely un-Roman, called a synthesis, or confection, served to hide his thin, slim legs, although it did not conceal his growing development of paunch. The Emperor was unmanly and undignified in appearance. He wore a silk handkerchief wrapped around his huge, bull-like neck, and Attilius saw two men in the background, anxiously watching over a cithara, or harp, carefully wrapped in the same purple silk the Emperor wore. They were always in attendance, for no one knew when it would please the Cæsar to entertain the faithful with a song.

Arriving within speaking distance, Attilius and Regulus halted; both threw up their hands in military salute, which seemed to please the Emperor, and then both bowed low before him.

"Greeting to the Imperator," said both in unison, "from two of his faithful soldiers."

And that greeting pleased the tyrant still more. As the two bowed low before him, he lowered the emerald through which he had been squinting at them and took another step in their direction, laid his hand upon the shoulder of the tribune and kissed his cheek, a senatorial privilege, though one which Nero in these late days rarely extended, since he was in constant enmity with the Senate—an enmity which all the servility of that degenerate body was insufficient to alter. But Caius Attilius had come from the front, he had not yet had time to enter into any of the cabals, conspiracies, and

factions of the Senate, hence the warmth of his welcome.

Regulus, being of the people, received no such mark of condescension. The Emperor, however, extended his hand to the centurion, who took it, bowed low over it, and released it.

"Greeting, noble Attilius, and thou, worthy centurion," began Nero affably, amid a chorus of exclamations and similar words of welcome from those who surrounded him and took their cue from him.

His voice was undeniably pleasant. Much humour has been exercised over his singing, but he sang undoubtedly much better than the ordinary man, albeit he was in no sense a great singer, and his conversational voice when he chose to make it so was agreeable accordingly.

"The corn ship," he continued, "we have been informed, which should have brought you hither foundered at sea with all my treasure. Well, our need of money is always great, is it not, Tigellinus?" he asked, throwing a meaning look at the tall, dark man in the pretorian uniform who had followed him closely.

"The treasures of the world are thine, divinity; thou hast but to stretch forth thy hand and take."

"Yes, I know," said Nero, smiling rather grimly, "but before we can take we must first find and—but enough of that. Thy life was spared, my tribune, and thine," he included the primipilus thus, "and for that we should be satisfied."

"Still," persisted Tigellinus, "it was a rare treasure that went down with the *Isis*."

"Thou wilt know," said Nero, laying his hand upon the arm of the commander of the Pretorian Guard, "thou wilt know where to find that which will make up to us for the loss, most excellent Tigellinus."

"Noble Cæsar," interposed Regulus boldly, yet with respect enough at this juncture, "I have observed in the course of my long life that things are frequently not always as bad as they seem."

"Art thou philosopher as well as soldier?" asked Nero, frowning slightly at this somewhat unceremonious interruption.

"I have played many parts in thy service in my day, Imperator, and this day I add another."

"And what may that be" asked Nero, frowning still more.

"That of thy treasurer for the nonce," answered the veteran, apparently no whit disturbed by Cæsar's frowns.

As he spoke he drew from under his toga the leather bag and presented it to the Emperor. Nero shrank back, surprised and a little fearful.

"Have these people been searched?" he cried sharply to Tigellinus.

"We bear no weapons," answered Attilius. "Hesitate not, O Cæsar," he continued. "Although the contents of this bag have been fought for and every separate item washed in blood, doubtless, it will bring only joy to thee."

"Take it, thou, Tigellinus," said Nero, apparently still distrustful.

The pretorian prefect seized the bag—whatever

his vices, he had not yet been made a coward by them as had the last of the Domitii whom he served—broke the strings and seals that closed it, opened it, peered within, and uttered an exclamation. He shot a quick glance at the two soldiers.

"Well," said Nero impatiently.

For answer, Tigellinus stepped to a little tripod of polished brass supporting a table of beautifully grained citron wood for which Nero had paid a king's ransom. He opened the bag and carefully let run from it a heap of jewels of every colour, size, and value. Nero instantly stepped to the tripod, bent over it, peered at the heap through his emerald, and laid his fingers caressingly over the jewels.

"The imperial treasury itself hath no finer stones than these," he said with the assurance of a connoisseur, which indeed he was in such matters. "Whence come these?"

"From thy prætor in Egypt," answered Attilius.

"How came the centurion by them?"

"When the ship appeared like to sink he took them from the cases that contained them, put them in this bag, bound it about his waist, and finally brought them to thee in safety."

"Are they all here?" asked Nero with a greedy sparkle in his eye.

The face of Attilius flushed at the insult in the question. Regulus was more hardened, and the colour did not easily come into his bronzed cheeks; still he felt the implication.

"When the invoice cometh from Egypt," he said

bluntly, "thou wilt find none of them missing or let my head be forfeit."

And here Tigellinus did an unusual thing. To be sure, Regulus was so humble that in him there was no possibility of a rival in the good graces of the Emperor.

"I knew this man in Spain, divinity; he had there a reputation for strict honesty."

"And hath it still," added Attilius promptly.

"He must indeed be an honest man," said a tall, handsome man of great elegance of bearing, somewhat older than the rest, who had watched and heard all with an expression of amused indifference, "if he made that reputation while in Spain in thy society, Tigellinus."

"By the gods, thou hast no mercy on the poor prefect, Petronius," laughed Nero.

The dark face of the prefect flushed under this sneering insult, but he knew too well his limitations when it came to exchanging verbal thrusts with the Arbiter Elegantiarum of Nero's court, to take any other notice of it or to express any resentment. He would bide his time.

"I thank thee, Sophonius Tigellinus," said Regulus stoutly, "for thy good word."

"Knowest thou to whom thou speakest, soldier?" asked Nero, looking at the bold and unawed centurion in some amazement. "Seest thou not my blazonry on his breast?"

"Perfectly, Imperator. Tigellinus is the commander of the Pretorian Guard, I am the primipilus of the Thundering Legion, or rather, I was."

"Hast thou completed thy years of service?"

"Aye, and twenty years added to the score."

"And dost thou now seek retirement?"

"Unless some emergency should call me to the field in Cæsar's service," answered Regulus.

"Will Cæsar permit me?" began Caius Attilius.

"Speak on."

"I have been the tribune of thy Fourteenth Legion and I know this man. No worthier soldier is to be found in thine armies."

"It is excellent testimony," said Nero, running his hands again through the jewels, "and these be powerful advocates." He lifted a sapphire. "Mark the blue," he said, turning to Tigellinus.

"There is but one thing bluer and brighter in Rome," said the pretorian prefect, examining the jewel closely.

"And what is that?"

"Thine eye, O Cæsar. And this diamond," continued Tigellinus, selecting a brilliant from the heap, "there is but one thing purer."

"And what is that?"

"Thy voice, divinity."

"Thou dost improve; by the gods, thou dost improve. Look to thy laurels, Petronius," laughed Nero, greatly pleased with this gross and vulgar flattery. "Now, soldier, what can I do for thee? Thou hast not come empty-handed from the wars?"

"I have a little treasure," answered Regulus. "A trifle to thee, but enough to keep a common soldier in peace and quietness in his declining days."

"And askest thou nothing of me?"

"But little, O Cæsar; if now I might wear a ring like that."

Regulus pointed to the Emperor's fat hand as he spoke.

"It is not enough for thy deserts, but take it," said Nero, drawing a plain gold ring from his finger and extending it to Regulus.

The latter fell to his knees and thrust out the little finger of his huge hand, upon which, after some difficulty, Nero forced on the ring.

"Rise, sir knight," he said. "Get thee a double stripe upon thy tunic at once."

"Hail to Cæsar," said Regulus, much delighted, rising to his feet and looking admiringly at the badge of his new knighthood on his stubby finger.

Nero picked up one of the smallest brilliants from the heap on the tripod table and handed it to Regulus.

"Knighthood for thy services, this for thine honesty."

"Thou hast not heard all that the worthy knight hath done in thy service, O Cæsar," said Caius Attilius, smiling.

"What more?"

"The gold and silver that was being carried on the *Isis* was landed, by this worthy soldier's direction, at Lasea, in Crete, and turned over to thy treasurer there. The ship was leaky and it was thought best not to trust the precious metals within her. Some of the more portable and valuable cargo is also there waiting thy commands."

"Thou hast a wise head, Regulus. I did well to

make thee knight; I shall make thee a senator yet doubtless."

"The gods forbid," said Regulus piously. "I am more at home in the barracks than in the Senate chamber."

"And how cometh it, Attilius, that all this was done by the worthy centurion when thou wert in command?" asked Nero.

"I was sick, ill unto death," answered Attilius, "unconscious with African fever. We were attacked by pirates, two——"

"Pirates in the Sea of Adria!" exclaimed Nero. "Anicetus, if thou wouldst remain my admiral this must be looked into."

"I will have them caught and crucified at once, divinity," hurriedly answered a man whose vesture sported a trident in token of his office.

"Whether they be there now or not no one can tell," said Attilius, "for we were bringing with us on the *Isis* a detachment of men who had completed their twenty years with the eagles. The pirates boarded us from either side; the legionaries drove them back upon their own ships and followed after. When the storm broke upon us it tore the three locked ships apart, and they were still fighting on the pirate decks when we lost sight of them. We have heard nothing more of them. I presume they foundered in the ensuing gale."

"And thou?"

"Our ship was so badly rammed that she sank in a few hours. The few legionaries left aboard, with some

of the seamen and Regulus, made a raft upon which they put me, and we drifted for three days. We were picked up by another belated corn ship from Alexandria, the *Osiris*, upon which we were wrecked at Melita. She carried prisoners from Syria and Judea——"

"Hast thou report of her?" asked Nero, turning to Tigellinus.

"Not yet, majesty."

"We left them at Melita waiting transfer," continued Attilius, "and came hither on a fast galley to report. I have recovered and have awaited thee here according to thy command."

"He hath not told all, most noble Cæsar," said Regulus. "We had been captured, and those bright baubles on the tripod yonder had been lost but for him. They made a secret attack upon the rear part of the ship. They climbed into the after cabin, where the brave tribune lay scarce conscious, but the sight of the faces of your enemies peering through the cabin windows aroused him. He got to his feet, the gods only know how, struck savagely with his sword, and drove them back. That saved us, for had they come through the cabin and fallen on our backs as we fought on deck, we had been lost."

"My duty as a soldier," murmured Attilius, much confused.

"How can I reward thee, tribune?" asked Nero.

"The Imperator hath honoured me with his friendship," said Attilius tactfully. "That kiss of greeting hath gained me the envy of all Rome, and I ask nothing but a continuance of that friendship."

"If thou wouldst increase that envy to madness, sing to him, divinity," interposed Petronius softly.

"Thou art ever considerate of strangers, Petronius," said Nero, looking at him in mock resentment, "but careless of thy Emperor."

"From which," returned the arbiter audaciously, "I infer that thou art not in good voice this morning."

"I—what hast thou noticed?" exclaimed Nero in alarm, his hand going to his throat. "I——"

"But even Cæsar at his worst surpasses the world at its best," continued Petronius smoothly, smiling into the face of the Emperor and so contagiously that Nero's good humour was instantly restored.

"If thou couldst sing as well as thou canst turn a compliment, I should be jealous of thee."

"And had I not thee to inspire me, I should be at loss for words also. Who, for instance, could compliment our worthy prefect here save on his black looks? Cheer up, man," continued Petronius, who much enjoyed baiting the stupid, brutal Tigellinus, "thou art in the presence of the sun, here is no place for clouds."

And again the gibe was received in silence by the soldier, and with smiles by some who felt sufficiently secure, through the friendship of Nero, to venture to incur the enmity of the prefect; not very many, to be sure.

"Bring hither the harp, Terpnos," said Nero, at which the whole company broke into rapturous exclamations of delight.

The skilled musician brought the unwrapped cithara

to the Emperor, and then tenderly took the handkerchief from his bull neck.

"What shall I sing, Petronius?" the Cæsar asked, affectedly clearing his throat. "Thou knowest my repertoire; shall it be something of Homer?"

"Homer!" exclaimed Petronius contemptuously. "Dost thou really seek to honour Attilius, divinity?"

"I do; thou knowest it."

"Sing something of thine own, then. Let outworn Homer rest in that oblivion into which thou hast consigned him with thine own incomparable verses."

"And thou alone of all my court——" began Nero.

"Art worthy of thy voice, divinity!" interrupted Petronius to the delight of the Emperor, who seized a jewel from the heap and extended it to the arbiter.

He shook his head.

"Do not dim the lustre of thy song by such a bauble as that, Cæsar," said Petronius. "Sing; that is enough."

And Nero sang. It was neither a bad song nor a bad voice, but it was not a great enough song, or a great enough voice, for an Emperor. As the applause died away, Cæsar handed back the harp.

"I would sing longer for thee, Attilius," he said, "but it is early in the morning. I must save my voice. What more can I do for thee?"

"Nothing. Thy voice, like thy kindness, overwhelms me," said the tribune, bowing low and biting his lips, whereat Petronius shot a meaning glance at him, recognising a kindred spirit. Fortunately neither Tigellinus nor the Emperor observed it.

"Thine appreciation of an artist is as great as thy merit as a soldier," said Nero. "Enter his name upon my tablets," he added, turning to one of the secretaries, "as one of the friends of Cæsar with the privilege of access to our presence without summons or announcement. I wish I had more men like thee about me."

"By the gods," growled Regulus thoughtlessly, "I can well believe that."

He surveyed the effeminate, spiritless crowd which surrounded the Emperor with a certain grim contempt which greatly amused Nero. In the midst of the Emperor's laughter, Tigellinus approached and spoke a few words into his master's ear.

"Tribune," said Nero, "thou hast shown thyself worthy in my service. I trust thee as I trust few even of my own household." He looked about, frowning and glaring somewhat fiercely at those around him. A faint chorus of protest arose as he continued, "I have messages of great importance to be delivered to Otho in Lusitania, to Julius Vindex in Gaul, and Suetonius Paullus in Britain. I will give thee a century or a cohort for thy escort since times are troubled. Wilt thou take my messages and bring me back the reports and the observations of a trained soldier?"

"At Cæsar's command," answered Attilius, composing his features into an iron calm lest his disappointment at being thus immediately ordered to service after so long an absence from Rome should appear.

"Come hither," said Nero, stepping away from the assemblage, followed by Tigellinus alone. "I know that thou hast earned a rest and that Rome appeareth

inviting to thy youth even as to mine, but this is a commission of great importance. Much dependeth upon it. There are few that I can trust. Return as quickly as thou canst and my favour rideth with thee. Thou shalt be legate to my Corbulo in the East, and a legion, perhaps later an army, shall be committed to thy charge."

"My life is Rome's and Rome is Nero's," answered Attilius simply.

"When canst thou start?"

"To-day."

"That is well said," answered Nero. "Eh, Tigellinus?"

"Well said indeed, divinity," answered the prefect.

"Make out the orders, let him take a cohort from one of the legions in northern Italy, and give him the packets. Report thyself to me instantly on thy return, and let nothing escape thy observation while away," said Nero meaningly to Attilius. "Dost understand? Thou art the eyes and ears of Cæsar."

"I understand."

"That is well. May the gods speed thee on thy way and bring thee safe to Rome again."

"Thy kindness overwhelmeth me," said Attilius. "The messengers of Cæsar will find me in my domus within an hour. Have we thy leave to withdraw?"

"Thou hast," said Cæsar, "but stay." He selected carefully a stone of great value from the heap of jewels, one of the largest of the diamonds. "This for the woman of thy heart."

He was evidently greatly pleased with Attilius, and

he knew how to be royally generous on occasion. The two soldiers bowed low before him, turned, and marched away. Not until they had gained the street and were well out of earshot did Regulus break forth.

"It is a shame," he said indignantly, "that thou shouldst be sent away from Rome ere thou hast become safely settled there, and on a wild errand to the ends of the world, to Lusitania, Gaul, and Britain—the utmost bounds of the West."

"Be silent," said Caius Attilius warningly. "Cæsar hath ears in every street. It is part of a soldier's duty."

"Aye," said Regulus, "I see through it. There is not one he can trust in the court. Thou art fresh in Rome, uncontaminated by disloyalty, unattached to any faction, uninfluenced by the intrigues that go on everywhere."

"And I am therefore in high favour with Nero," laughed Attilius. "Well, I have but little to keep me here," but as he spoke he thought at the same time of Lady Lollia and of British Gwenna.

"I will go with thee," said Regulus suddenly. "I am not to old to put on the harness again, and Lusitania is a country in which I have campaigned."

"Nay," said Attilius, "thou shalt stay here and watch over my house, my slaves, my——"

"That British Gwenna of thine," said Regulus bluntly, filling out the sentence.

"Even so," replied Attilius, and why the colour came into his cheeks as he did so he could not tell, although the fact annoyed him greatly.

"Well, I will do it with my life," said the new-made

knight. "Now that I am a man of position and influence," he fondled the gold ring upon his little finger, "I can the better serve thee."

"What knowest thou of Tigellinus?"

"I served with him when he was but a tribune like thyself, and I a simple legionary in the ranks."

"And didst thou love him?"

"Nay, none loved him, but it was my fortune to do him some trifling service."

"And that was——"

"Well, I saved his life, if the truth be told, and I have often thought it would have been better for Rome had I not done so."

"Doth he still remember the circumstance?"

"I shall see."

"Meanwhile, as he is all-powerful with the Emperor, thou hadst best keep on his good side."

"And so I shall," added Regulus thoughtfully, "if for no other reason than for thy sake."

CHAPTER X

THE TRIBUNE GOES UPON A JOURNEY

Preparations for the journey were not extensive, nor did it require much time for Attilius to slip into his well-worn armour, to have his modest belongings packed, and to detail some of his freedmen and slaves to accompany him. Pheidippides, with the counsel of Regulus, or indeed without it, was quite capable of attending to his master's affairs. A few words put the major-domo in possession of the necessary facts. A long time before the hour he had set for his departure, the tribune had completed his preparations. To attempt to see Lollia Claudia at this hour of the morning would be preposterous. He was sure that unless something extraordinary was toward she would not arise until long after midday, and to have disturbed her before would have been to forfeit any chance at her affections.

Caius Attilius had a wax-coated writing tablet brought to him, and indited a brief letter to her, informing her of the courteous and distinguished welcome he had received at the Emperor's hands, of the commission which had been thrust upon him, and that he was compelled, to his very great regret, to depart without seeing her, and so bade her farewell. To trace these letters upon the wax, to fold together, tie and seal the leaves, and entrust the delivery to one of the

slaves, took also but little time. Strangely enough he did not send her the Emperor's jewel!

He looked toward the water-clock. It was drawing on to the hour of twelve, which was the time set for his departure. Regulus had withdrawn for the time being, and with the departure of the messenger to Lollia, Attilius was left alone. He clapped his hands and bade the answering slave send British Gwenna into his presence.

In a moment she stood before him. She was clad this time in a longer tunic of a beautiful blue colour which reached to her ankles. Her delicate feet were shod in sandals laced with blue like the tunic. The garment was girdled below the breast and was of the sleeveless variety. Nothing could have better become her. The gorgeous tissue of silver had detracted from rather than added to her beauty, but the blue tunic brought out every radiance of her face and colour. The graceful folds suggested rather than concealed the youthful, yet already splendid, figure they enshrouded.

Attilius stared at her without a word. He reflected afterward that whenever she came into his presence she seemed to strike him speechless, and it was usually she who had to break the silence. He had been ready enough with his answers when he conversed with the all-powerful Nero who could ruin him with a word, but this woman whom he owned, with whom he could do as he liked and no hand could be raised in her defence, no voice speak a word in her behalf, made him strangely dumb and silent.

"Thou hast sent for me—master," she began at last.

There was a long hesitation between the first words and the last. The maiden did not love the title, and yet without compunction she said it deliberately. Old Lais had been talking to her evidently. Her demeanour outwardly was even submissive. She stood with her head slightly bent and with her hands crossed upon her breast, and the little touch of humility made her even more beautiful than before. How different she was from the black-haired, black-eyed, brilliant Lollia Claudia! Yet, although that one had never stood before him a slave, this girl's bearing, in spite of her attitude, was really as full of pride as if she had been the daughter of a hundred senators of Rome.

"Yes," said Attilius, "I did send for thee to bid thee farewell."

Now, there was no reason on earth why Caius Attilius should bid the newest of his slaves farewell, and he fully realised the unusualness of his position, although she was as yet so little accustomed to her servitude that she did not realise it at all. And indeed a feeling of dismay at the announcement so instantly possessed her that she gave no thought to other things.

In all the months that had elapsed since her captivity, he was the only Roman who had shown her the least degree of kindness or human feeling. Her beauty, her availability, had saved her from the outrages which had been visited upon her less fortunate sisters. She was too valuable a piece of property to be spoiled in transit, but she had been regarded and treated simply as a piece of merchandise. Her feelings had been outraged, her person exposed. She had been

discussed and commented upon as if she had no more human feeling than a horse.

She had borne these indignities because she had to, because she was without even a semblance of a weapon. Her captors had taken good care to see that no means of doing herself bodily harm was ever available. They had even cut her finger-nails close lest she should scratch her cheeks and so mar her beauty and render herself less salable. She had tried to starve herself, but they had forced her to eat, and they had watched her constantly day and night. The scene in the courtyard when she had struck old Phryx to prevent an exposure of herself to that gaping mob had been the climax of all the tortures she had endured.

She had heard vaguely of the treatment accorded to slaves by the Romans, and all that she had heard had been intensified by the jibes of the slave dealers to whom she had fallen. She had at first expected little better at the hands of Attilius. He seemed somewhat different from the rest, it is true, and he had undeniably interfered in her behalf in those awful moments on the slave dealer's block, but whether he wished to preserve her for himself or for other reasons she could not tell.

Yet since she had been of his household her treatment had been kindly, even gentle. Except that she was a slave, a bitter thing for her to realise, no more considerate usage could have been meted out to her; nothing degrading or humiliating had been required of her, nothing of the kind seemed to be intended toward her. There was a pleasanter, a more contented atmosphere

in the establishment of the tribune than she had deemed possible.

Slaves took their cues from their masters. A cruel master, a hard, harsh, ruthless owner, made hard, harsh, ruthless, cruel slaves and each one in his separate sphere meted out to those beneath him the same treatment that he received; the converse proposition was, naturally, equally true. There is a contagion in good breeding as well as in bad. Although he was a soldier, Attilius was in the best sense of the word a Roman gentleman, and his example was not without force even among the motley people he held in bondage.

Lais, the matron of the slaves and the head of the women's quarters, and Pheidippides, the freedman major-domo, followed the tribune's example, and even when Attilius was not in residence things went on much as they did when he was there, perhaps a little more easily, if the truth be told.

The loss of liberty and the personal restraint was a dreadful thing to the freeborn British maiden, but since liberty was lost and she was restrained, she had begun to thank her gods that she was where she was. She could remember the leering, brutal, lustful faces of the other Romans who had bid for her. She might have fallen into their hands instead of to this kindly soldier. She had not yet learned that the bravest were the tenderest or the loving were the daring—which indeed was not always true, especially in Rome—but she had wondered if such, in substance, might not be true of Caius Attilius. And as she wondered so she also prayed.

She could never be happy, she thought, as a slave,

but after all to which she had been subjected, and after the possibilities that had loomed before her, the quiet domus of the tribune was like a haven of rest. She was almost becoming contented. Her father, her brethren, had been killed when the Iceni had been conquered by the Romans, her mother had died long before, and she was alone. Some rude British chieftain might have seized her and borne her away, willy-nilly, to his forest lair; in which case at least her fate would not have been much better than her present condition.

She was a woman of fine instincts and deep feelings which had been intensified by the unusual education she had received in Roman Gaul, and she looked forward with positive pleasure to the lessons of Eurotas in the Greek tongue, in which so many treasures were written. To be reader to her master—if she could once get over that mastership!—promised pleasant things. She would study diligently to deserve and receive his approval, hoping to fit herself for the promised position and perhaps some day earn her freedom. Meanwhile, taught by old Lais, she had already begun to acquire the nice art of properly draping a toga.

She was a sensible, if hot-tempered, young woman in a way, too. She realised the inevitable since it was presented to her, and she had made up her mind to accept it with such philosophy as she could, praying to her gods that her honour, if not her dignity, might be preserved. She would deserve well of Attilius by her faithful services, by her studious application, by her aptitude, by her humility. Her cheek flushed and her bosom heaved as she pronounced the word to herself.

It was not a pleasant word to have to speak, even to have to think, for this freeborn, haughty, imperious maiden.

It cannot be denied that one factor in reconciling her to her lot, which is not the least important because it has been left to the last, was Attilius himself. There was no more handsome, splendid type of Roman manhood in all Italy than he. Young, well above the average height, well-knit, active, martial, arrogant—even that last quality thrilled the maiden! She had woman's wit enough, in spite of her youth, to realise that she had made an impression upon the master, and she was woman enough to desire to deepen that impression, which she was consciously or unconsciously determined to do, not realising the possible consequences to him or to her.

It was, therefore, with a tremendous sense of shock that she received the communication of the intentions of the tribune. That he should announce his departure now when she had just made up her mind, at what cost he would never know, that she would submit to the inevitable and strive to deserve his kindness, swept her away from her moorings at once. She had not yet learned that the will of Attilius was the will of the household. She feared that with him gone her position would be entirely changed. Dismay overwhelmed her, nor was the dismay due entirely to the fear of the consequences of his absence. It was dismay because he was going and she should not see him for a long time.

She had planned to exhibit to him, day by day, as he gave her opportunity, the advances she made in her

studies, and she had counted unconsciously upon his encouragement. But now she felt almost as lost and alone as she had when she had been first seized in the plundered camp, defenceless before what enemies the gods alone knew. This bereavement flashed swiftly through her mind.

"Thou art going away, lord?" she asked, staring at him with frightened eyes.

"To my very great regret, yes."

"Will it be for a long time?"

"Perhaps for six months, or it may be for a year."

"But thou wilt come back?"

"As soon as I can."

"Take me with thee," she broke out in all innocence.

"On a soldier's errand?"

"But why must thou go, and where?" she continued, utterly oblivious to her slavery and the impropriety of questioning her master as to his comings and goings.

Her dismay was so manifest, her concern so patent, and both were so pleasant to Attilius that he overlooked them. Many times as she stood before him he quite forgot that she was a slave and his property. He treated her as he would any other maiden with whom he might come in contact.

"The answer to thy question is short, British Gwenna. At the Emperor's command and wherever he sendeth me."

"But Lais said that thou hadst been away long years at the wars and that thou hadst come home to rest and enjoy thyself."

"Lais is a wise old woman and she hath truly set

forth my purpose. But it is the Cæsar's will that governeth."

"And thou must go?"

"I must."

"And dost thou like thy errand?"

"I did not care very much," answered Attilius truthfully, "until——"

"Until thou didst think of the lady Lollia," flashed out the slave.

"What knowest thou of the lady Lollia?" asked Attilius, frowning heavily.

"I know but little—the girls in the slave quarters——" She faltered, suddenly conscious of her grave blunder.

"They gossip too much," thundered the tribune, his frown deepening. "I am too kind a master."

His brow was now black with growing indignation.

"I have offended thee," protested Gwenna humbly and remorsefully, "and thou hast treated me so kindly. I make but poor reward for thy gentle usage. The fault is mine. I encouraged them to talk about thee. I wanted to know——" She stopped suddenly again, realising upon the verge of what perilous admission she had been led. And then she did a strange thing. She fell on her knees and extended her hands to him. "Master," she said, "forgive them and me. Thine anger—hurteth."

"Fear not——" began Attilius more mildly.

"Nay," interrupted the woman, "it is not fear that maketh me kneel."

"Rise then," said the tribune not unkindly. "I

pass it by for this time, but let there be no more gossip of the lady Lollia or of my affairs. Besides," he admitted frankly, "I am sorry to have to go because I must leave thee behind. I should have enjoyed noting thy progress and—but thou wilt be quite safe with Pheidippides and Lais and the worthy knight, Regulus, new made by Cæsar this morning. He hath promised to abide here and take care of my proper—of thee," he added as he saw the woman's face flush. "Thou wilt be a faithful maiden, and when I return I shall expect great things of thee. Thou wilt not be confined to the house, but under suitable escort mayest go abroad and see the great city in its power and in its beauty. I forget not that thou art the daughter of a chieftain in thine own land, and I shall give orders to Pheidippides that any reasonable wish of thine shall be respected, so thou dost not seek to escape me."

"To whom could I turn but to thee, lord; where else might I seek shelter?" asked the woman. "I will study to deserve thy commendation, and again for all that thou hast done, I thank thee. The words are simple," she continued, "but they mean much."

She had arisen, she stepped forward, seized his hand, bent low over it as she had done in the slave market, and kissed it. The warm touch of her lips sent a strange thrill through the young Roman. He was not ready, however, in his dealings with women, especially with a woman who was at once princess and slave. An awkward pause, or what would have been an awkward pause if it had been prolonged, was broken by the entrance of Pheidippides.

"Worthy tribune," he began, "the messengers of Nero are at the door."

"Admit them into the atrium."

In a moment a centurion of the pretorians came in. He bore in his hand several packets sealed with the Emperor's seal. He stopped and saluted.

"Greeting," he said tersely, "to the noble tribune."

"Greeting," answered Attilius, "to the messenger of Cæsar."

"Here are thy messages," said the centurion, stepping forward and placing the several packets in the extended hand of the tribune, "to Cæsar's legates in Lusitania, Gaul, and Britain. Here also," continued the officer, presenting another unsealed packet, "are thine orders. From the garrison at Ariminium thou wilt take a cohort in accordance with thy fancy. The imperial treasurers have orders to furnish thee with the money thou wilt need, and every officer of the Empire is here bid to speed thee on thy way. If aught else be required, Cæsar bade me ask thee to declare it and he would see that it was provided."

"Say to the Imperator that what he hath done is more than enough. Declare to him also that by the time thou art in his presence I shall be on the way."

"Health and success attend thee," said the centurion, saluting. "Farewell."

"For thy good wishes, many thanks."

"And may the gods have thee in their keeping."

As the centurion turned away Gwenna spoke again:

"Thou wilt go to Britain, thou wilt see the land of my birth, its hills and valleys, its fertile fields, its noble

woodlands, its silvery rivers! Would that I might go with thee, lord!"

"Who knoweth, British Gwenna, the ordering of the Fates?" said Attilius. "Some day thou mayest look upon that land again; and as for me, when I set foot upon it I shall think of thee——"

"Waiting thy return," said the maiden, smiling through her tears.

"And if that doth not resemble perilously the parting of two lovers," thought old Pheidippides, surveying the scene, "my old heart doth not recognise the ancient symptoms."

Book III

THE DISPLEASURE OF THE EMPEROR

CHAPTER XI

THE MAIDEN IS LOST

A succession of events had detained Caius Attilius far beyond his expectations. He had left Rome about the winter solstice. A year and more had elapsed and spring was now beginning for the second time since his departure. He had seen some service, eagerly welcoming the opportunity, under Otho in Spain, had passed some time with Julius Vindex in Gaul, and had taken part with distinction in one sharp and exciting campaign in Britain under Suetonius Paullus, who was rapidly subduing the southern part of that turbulent, liberty-loving island. But now he was rejoiced to be back in the city again.

Having delivered his report to the Emperor instantly on his return to Rome, he had been graciously commended for the discharge of his duty with a promise of a relief from further service, and an intimation that whenever he had had enough of the idleness of the city he should have the leadership of a legion under Corbulo, in Asia Minor, with the right of succession to the supreme command in the Far East when that worthy soldier should retire or withdraw. With further profuse promises of greater rewards from Nero, with whom he stood in high favour because the Emperor saw but little of him, Attilius made all speed to his domus on the Aventine, passing on the way the residence of

the senator Publius Claudius, Lollia's father. If he had stopped to think about it his failure to avail himself of the opportunity for a call upon Lollia might have given rise to a suspicion as to the state of his affections.

Truth to tell, his mind was so full of Gwenna that he did not give a passing moment to the fair lady whom he had once fancied might become the mistress of his household. The thought of Gwenna had been with him much more constantly than befitted her lowly station. For her sake he had struck with the flat of the sword rather than with the edge of the blade those British barbarians against whom he had campaigned; and for her sake he had spared men and women who would otherwise have filled his purse with their ransoms, or their price as slaves. All of her compatriots he had taken he had allowed to go free in her name, including some of her own tribe of Iceni. But he had no thought of extending the same gift of liberty to Gwenna—on the contrary!

He wondered what had happened to her in the year; whether she had added Greek to her ability to use the ruder Latin language which she spoke with just the shade of an accent that would have been torture to Cicero but that was sweet to him. He speculated as to how she would grapple with the majesty and grace of the Attic tongue. The neglect of his own education was pressed home to him, and he resolved, as he had many times, often to avail himself of her powers as his reader, provided she had fitted herself for the position.

He thought with a thrill as he hastened along the way, attended by the slaves he had taken with him, that in a short time he would doff the heavy war harness which he had worn almost constantly since his departure, that he would enjoy a refreshing bath, and then that over a fresh tunic her white, graceful hands would drape the spotless toga of his Roman citizenship.

He wondered if she would be clumsy at that task. He wondered if she would hesitate and stumble in her reading; and if either, he wondered why. He wondered how she would meet him or greet him. He wondered many things, and he had wondered them often while he had been away. The journey from the palace to his home was all too short to exhaust his thoughts, all too long for his desires. He quickened his steps, and but that it had been undignified he would have run as he came in sight of his vestibule.

Syfax, the porter, stood within. Caius Attilius travelled faster than couriers usually, and he had made the last stage of the journey down through Italy at headlong speed. No message of his coming had preceded him. Syfax was startled almost out of his wits by the sudden appearance of his master. He recovered himself instantly, and his loud and hearty greeting echoed through the vestibule into the atrium and even into the peristyle beyond.

"Salve, Domine!" he cried in his great voice. "The master is home," he shouted, scarcely waiting for any return to his greeting. "What ho, within—the noble Attilius returns."

The house, which had been quiet enough in all con-

science, awoke suddenly into activity. Pheidippides, from the office in which he transacted his patron's business, instantly appeared. Lais came running from the women's quarters. The atrium was immediately filled with men and women all uttering greetings, the sincerity of which was attested by the smiles on the faces of the slaves. Attilius comprehended the multitude in one sweeping glance, seeking for a tunic of blue and a head covered by that reddish-gold coronet upon which his mind had dwelt so often. She was not there! A shade of annoyance swept across his face.

"Noble Attilius," began Pheidippides nervously and with great agitation, "we have missed thee sorely; never had we more need of thee than now."

"It is good to be back again," answered the Roman, handing his sword to one, his helmet to another, while a third unbuckled his belt, and a fourth made haste to relieve him of his cuirass. "Have me a bath prepared at once," he said to the slave charged with that duty, "and bring me a fresh tunic, new sandals to take the place of these harsh military boots, a toga—by all the gods, it is good to be among you all again in Rome. Thou saidst that thou hadst need of me, Pheidippides, and indeed thou hast a troubled look. What is amiss in the familia?"

Pheidippides looked at the young tribune with growing hesitation. He had news which his heart divined would not be welcome, and just how to break it he could not quite decide. Every slave in the household knew the situation as well as the freedman, and the smiles and murmurings suddenly ceased.

"I do not see the worthy knight, Regulus; where is he?" continued the master.

"Unfortunately, he was called to Brundisium," answered Pheidippides, "on a matter of business a few days since. If he had been here it had not happened."

"What had not happened?" asked Attilius. His thoughts instantly turned to the absent. There might be hundreds of slaves who were not there, he could not begin to know them all by name or even by appearance, but he at once divined that what they were perturbed about, or what they were keeping from him, related to Gwenna. "Why do ye stand there staring?" he thundered, stepping forward and frowning, whereat they all fell back. "Answer me, Pheidippides. By the gods, I shall repent me of having made thee free. Where is the maiden?"

Although no mention had been made of British Gwenna it was more than evident that his question had struck home. And still no one answered. No one dared.

"By great Jupiter himself," thundered the tribune, "are ye all struck dumb? Thou, Lais, hast a woman's tongue; it runneth fast enough on occasion. Speak thou."

"My lord, my lord," faltered old Lais, "remember that I held thee against this breast when thou wert a child."

"I mean thee no harm," said Attilius more mildly, "but I shall kill some one if I be not told. Pheidippides, any of you, answer me."

"She hath gone," burst from one or two in the

crowd, and taking advantage of their numbers the whole assemblage now gave him that startling reply.

"Gone!" exclaimed Attilius, whose dismay and disappointment needed not to be imagined they were so apparent. "Where?"

"Lord, we know not!" answered Pheidippides, at last finding voice.

"When?"

"Last night."

"With whom?"

"With thy slave—Zoilus."

"The cellarer?"

"The same."

"Hath he disappeared too?"

"We found him drunk on the Via Sacra early this morning and brought him home. He was stupid with liquor, and I flung him into a cell and set a watch over him."

"Thou hast well done," said Attilius grimly. He turned to the man who had charge of the slaves, a brawny Cappadocian, named Gellia. "Bring him hither."

"And if he should still be drunk?" asked that functionary.

"Souse him in the fountain of the peristyle until he recover his wits, but bring him hither and quickly. Now tell me what thou hast done," he said, turning to Pheidippides, as the keeper and the other slaves whom he had commanded hastened away.

"There is but little to tell, lord," answered the freedman. "Gwenna, with the other slaves, had liberty to

go out under proper escort. Generally old Eurotas accompanied her when she went abroad——"

"Eurotas—where is he?"

"Ill of a fever. He would be here to greet thee if he could crawl from his bed."

"Proceed."

"Eurotas being ill and Gwenna having some errand into which I did not inquire, Zoilus volunteered to escort her whither she would."

"Was he in liquor then?"

"I did not notice."

"Oh, Pheidippides, Pheidippides!"

"Reproach me not, lord, else under thy displeasure I shall despatch a life that, though thou hast made me free, is thine alway," answered the old man remorsefully.

"Nay, nay," said Attilius more kindly, "I will forgive thee so no harm come to the maiden."

"The sweetest maiden in all thy household," said Lais. "I have listened while she studied with Eurotas. She readeth my noble tongue with the sweetness and fire of Sappho."

"She is as learned as Aspasia," added Pheidippides mournfully. "Even the worthy Regulus, who giveth but little thought to women, cherisheth her."

"Enough," cried Attilius. "You madden me; she is gone."

"Here is Zoilus, master," cried the Cappadocian, dragging after him a huge slave dripping with water, his head rolling, his eyes still stupid.

"Thou drunkard," cried Attilius, clenching his hands

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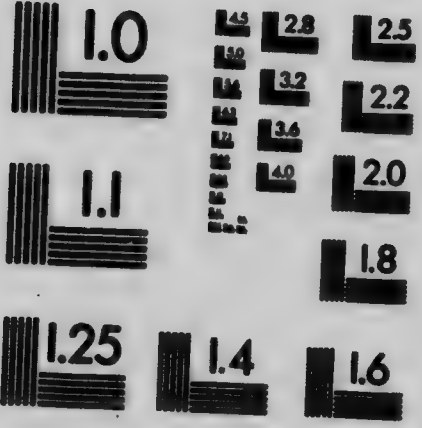

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and feeling for the sword that had hung so long by his side, "what hast thou done with the maiden Gwenna?"

Zoilus stared stupidly at his master at first, not the faintest appreciation of his position having yet entered his head. But the ducking he had received and the terror which suddenly fell upon him at the fact that Attilius was there, the incarnation of wrathful passion, quickly cleared his brain. He suddenly remembered all. He fell to the marble pavement, caught the booted feet of the Roman, and grovelled in terror.

"Forgive, lord," he wailed. "I did but try to snatch a kiss."

Attilius spurned him with his foot as if he had been a craven cur.

"Stand up, thou," he cried. "Thou shalt die upon thy feet, like a man, rather than grovel like the reptile thou art. Drag him up," he continued, as the slaves hauled the cellarer to his feet and held him weak and trembling before the infuriated tribune.

Although it probably meant the death of their fellow-servant, there was no hesitation in complying with the peremptory request of Caius Attilius in that mood.

"Now my sword!"

This was instantly thrust into his hand; he whipped it out of its scabbard and pointed it at the throat of the slave.

"Answer me," he said, "answer me truly. Thou hast sought to force thy unwelcome attentions upon this poor maiden?"

"Am I to blame, lord?" said Zoilus, striving for his

courage, "that I loved her? Who among the slaves doth not? And is not she herself the best excuse? And——"

"Had she ever given thee any encouragement, had she ever looked upon thee or given thee a thought, she a princess of the Iceni and thou a degenerate Thracian?"

"Master," said Zoilus desperately, "she was but a slave after all, and I loved her, and with thy consent I would have married her."

"Thou—thou——" cried Attilius in fury.

"I did not know," went on the Thracian hurriedly, "that she was reserved for thee——"

"Say thy last prayer to the gods quickly, Zoilus," said Attilius, drawing back his arm.

Pheidippides alone ventured to interfere.

"If thou dost kill him now thou shalt not learn what hath become of her, lord," he said.

"True," said Attilius, dropping the sword, putting his hands to his head. "A quick thrust with a bright blade were a soldier's fate. Flogging, crucifixion, starvation, the lions of the arena—these were more meet for him."

"My lord," said Zoilus more bravely, "at thy command. I"—he wetted his lips and looked forlornly about the excited circle, and piteously glanced into the face of Attilius—"I loved the maiden honestly. It is true I heard she was a princess of Britain, but I was freeborn in Thrace. I had never spoken with her, her mind was fixed on other things, and although I am among the foremost of thy slaves, she never noticed

me. For some reason she had many errands, was often abroad with Eurotas. I heard Lais say that she was anxious to go out last night upon some particular business which I did not know. She had permission of Pheidippides."

"True," answered the freedman.

"Where went she so often?"

"My lord, I do not know. Old Eurotas is perfectly trustworthy and they always returned at a reasonable hour. I did not question. For that I am at fault."

"Master," said Lais, "I have seen British Gwenna make a sign like this when on occasion being abroad upon an errand of mine own I passed Eurotas and the maiden talking with people on the street."

As she spoke Lais' fingers traced an irregular outline in the air.

"The sign of the fish," said Attilius, recognising it instantly. "Could it be that——" He stopped and left the question unanswered. "Proceed with thy story, Zoilus."

"We walked together down the Sacred Way and turned into the Subura by one of the side streets. The maiden had borne herself as if she had been a princess indeed, rather than a slave, and had made me keep in the rear. I was offended in my pride and my passion was inflamed. We were alone. I was the stronger——"

Attilius stepped nearer the man, his fist clenched.

"If thou strikest me," cried the slave, "if thou killest me, thou canst learn no more."

"Go on."

"I had carried with me a flask of thy best wine, vintage Opimian."

"Thief also," hissed out the tribune.

Zoilus nodded his head. He had made up his mind that his only salvation lay in an absolute and entire confession, and he knew his chances were slender even in that case. No law of man would hold Caius Attilius accountable for anything he did to a slave and there were no recognised laws of God; no gods at all, even, in the prevalent Roman creed of that day.

"Between the presence of the maiden and the potency of the wine, I lost my wits," he admitted woefully but honestly. "I ran forward, caught her about her waist, drew her to me——"

"Didst thou press her lips to thine?" asked Attilius in the deadly pause that followed the incompleted sentence, his voice low but tremulous with passion.

"I would have done so," the man whispered through his white lips, "I admit it, and she herself and her beauty are my justification, but we were interrupted."

"How? Why?"

"Lord, wilt thou spare me if I tell thee all?"

"Wretch," cried the tribune, "dost thou seek to make conditions with me? Speak. I will have thee torn limb from limb but I will have the truth. If thou cravest an easy and a speedy death conceal nothing, or by the gods——"

"I can tell little more," said Zoilus. "A body of men, cloaked, tore us apart. One cried, 'She is meet for thy betters,' another, 'Let us toss her in the blanket,' and a third shouted, 'This for thee.' I re-

ceived a buffet which struck me senseless to the pavement. It was about the third hour of the night. When I came to my senses, bleeding and sick, the maiden was gone. I realised what I had done. I entered the nearest wine shop and drank and drank until I was thrust out into the street, and I awoke to find myself here."

"And is this the truth?"

"By the soul of my mother, it is."

"What hast thou done to find her?" said the tribune suddenly, turning to Pheidippides.

"Many of thy slaves and thy clients and freedmen are even now searching the streets. I was minded to go to the city prefect and should have done so ere this hadst thou not returned."

"I will appeal unto Cæsar. Whoever hath hurt hair of that maiden shall pay for it with his life. No man shall be so high placed as not to feel my vengeance." Attilius lifted his hand to the heavens. "By the god of the Legion, I swear it. And thou, Zoilus——"

"A messenger, lord," cried Syfax, the porter, who had stood nearest the vestibule, "for Pheidippides, the freedman of the noble Attilius."

"I am here," answered Pheidippides, turning.

"Make way," said the porter.

The next instant a slender, dark-eyed, dark-haired youth of Hebrew aspect entered the little group. He looked curiously at Attilius, and instantly, with Jewish shrewdness, divined that he was no freedman. He turned accordingly to the grey-bearded, venerable Pheidippides.

"Hail, master," he said, "this for thee."

"Boy," said Attilius, catching him roughly by the shoulder, "dost thou bring tidings of Gwenna by any happy chance?"

"If Gwenna," said the boy, looking fearlessly at him, "be the name of the Christian maiden who sought shelter last night with Paulus of Tarsus, then I bring tidings."

"The gods be praised," cried Attilius. "The letter."

Unhesitatingly Pheidippides handed it to him, and with nervous hands Caius Attilius broke the seals.

CHAPTER XII

THE GRATITUDE OF THE TRIBUNE

"*Paulus, the prisoner of Jesus Christ in Rome, to Pheidippides, Freedman at the house of the Tribune, Caius Attilius; Greeting: Grace to thee and peace.*

"Thy patron, with whom I was shipwrecked on Melita, hath been good enough to declare an obligation to me. Last night there came to me at my apartment in a great insula on the slope of the Viminal Hill, in the Subura, above the Vicus Patricius and near the gate that leadeth to the Pretorian Camp, a certain Gwenna, a member of his household. She had been sorely used and was in great terror. Therefore I detained the maiden with me albeit she is ready to give herself into thy hands. I dare not trust her in the streets alone, I have no one to send with her and I have no liberty to go abroad myself. I, Paulus, therefore, beseech thee that thou wilt come thyself and receive her at my hands. Commend me to the noble Attilius when he returneth, or shouldst thou write him. Farewell."

"She is there!" cried Attilius, when he had rapidly perused the tablets. "Read thou." He thrust them into the hands of Pheidippides. "My armour," he cried, while the major-domo was reading, "and be quick about it," he added as the slaves hastened toward him.

"My sword, too," he continued as it was belted about his waist.

"Lord," said Pheidippides, "I will go. Thou art weary with thy journey and would fain refresh thyself."

"Nay," answered Attilius, "I myself will bring back the maiden. Do thou choose some stout slaves to go with me and see that they carry swords. There is more to this than appears. Meanwhile thrust Zoilus into the darkest cell and watch him well. Where is the messenger?"

"Here, and at thy service, lord," answered the Jewish boy, who had stepped aside.

"And here are thy men," said Pheidippides, pointing to a half-score of the stoutest among the slaves who had hastily armed themselves with swords and shields and put on leathern caps and jackets of leather reinforced with steel plates.

"Well done," answered the tribune, to continue to call him by his familiar title. "This for thy faithful messengership, lad," he added as he handed the boy a gold piece. "Lead us back to the insula where Paulus dwelleth by the quickest way. I would that the horses we left at the Milvian Bridge were here."

"They would be of but little service, lord," said the boy, "for without them I can guide you by back ways, which will enable us to save much time we should lose had we to take to the broader streets."

"Lead on," said Attilius. "And, Pheidippides, do thou give the people a holiday, as many as can be spared to-day, and enough sesterces to enable them all

to drink my health in what they choose. But keep Zoilus in close ward. I will see thee on my return and determine his fate then."

In too long a time indeed for his desires, although the minutes that elapsed were but short, the boy, with unerring instinct, had led the hurrying tribune and his party through by-ways and alleys until they stopped before an immense apartment house called an insula which stood halfway up the slope of the Viminal, overlooking the Subura, or lowest quarter of the town. The valley space between that hill and the Esquiline was densely crowded with wretched dwellings. Back of the insula, which was the largest and most prominent in the neighbourhood, the top of the hill was covered with beautiful gardens and noble houses. From the highest story of the huge, lofty building one had a lovely view upon one side of the patrician abodes, while upon the other side the spectator overlooked the city walls, and upon the third the vision comprehended the crowded dwellings of the very humblest classes.

This particular insula stood somewhat removed from many others lower down the hill and provided a more spacious and more comfortable habitation than most of the other apartment houses, or tenement blocks, with which that section of Rome abounded. The city was much congested. Even in those days landowners had begun to build upward on account of the immense value of the ground within the walls.

Arrived before the building, the guide turned and walked rapidly down a narrow street and around the corner. In front of them a flight of steps led to a

public terrace above the second story, and from this another and a private flight of stairs led to the top story—the sixth—of the building. When they had surmounted these they found themselves on a landing before a small vestibule. The boy turned the door upon its pivot without further ceremony, and indicated that the tribune should enter.

Without a second's hesitation, Caius Attilius, bidding his slaves wait for him below, stalked through the doorway and found himself in a large, well-lighted room, something like the atrium of smaller houses, although utterly devoid of any of the usual luxuries. There were four people in the room; two of them were Hebrews, one was a Greek, and the other was a Roman soldier. The silver mounting of his uniform instantly apprised Attilius that the soldier was a member of the Pretorian Guard. As the tribune entered, the soldier, who had been lounging against one of the windows, turned his head, recognised a superior, straightened up, and brought his hand to his helmet in salute.

As he did so, Attilius was conscious of a not unmusical clinking as of the jangling of steel. The cause of the unusual sound was not difficult to discover. Around the left wrist of the soldier a fetter of steel was clasped. From it there ran from the left wrist of one of the Hebrews, who happened to be standing, bending over a table, leaning upon it at the time, a thin steel chain. It was long enough for a large part of it to lie on the floor, and although it was fastened to a similar manacle over a woolen band on

the left wrist of the standing Hebrew, it did not interfere very greatly with his freedom of movement.

The low clink of the steel and the creak of the door upon its pivot aroused the attention of the man at the table. He looked up and peered at the tribune. The young man presented a very different appearance then from that picture of him which the mind of the old Hebrew cherished. For all their striking brightness, the eyes of the man were not good. He blinked uncertainly for a moment. He stepped forward and, seeing better, recognised the newcomer. Before he could say a word the messenger spoke.

"I bring thee, in answer to thy message, honoured master, the noble Caius Attilius himself."

"It is even so," said Lucas, the Greek. "Greeting."

"I recognise thee now," exclaimed Paulus, smiling. "Thou art very welcome. I appreciate the honour done to my poor abode."

"Greeting, Paulus, and thou, too, Lucas," answered Attilius. "By happy chance, or the will of the gods, I arrived home from Gaul this morning. I found my slave Gwenna gone, and as I questioned my household as to her absence thy letter to Pheidippides was put in my hand."

"It is indeed an opportune ordering," said Paulus, "that brought thee home."

"Aye," said Attilius, "but the maiden?"

Paulus hesitated and looked meaningly at Lucas, who had drawn near to him and whispered something in his ear.

"Thou canst understand me now?" asked Paulus,

turning to Attilius and addressing him this time in the Greek tongue.

"Perfectly," answered Attilius, who was, like most educated Romans, a good Grecian, wondering for a moment at the use of that language.

The next moment Paulus explained it, for without looking at the pretorian, he nevertheless addressed a quick remark in Greek to him. The man gave no evidence whatever of having heard or comprehended, although so soon as he had spoken Paulus observed him narrowly.

"I am a prisoner, noble Attilius," he said in Greek, in which all the future conversation was carried on. "I have to keep guard on the door of my lips, and there is in this something that concerneth"—he hesitated—"the chief man of the empire," he added euphemistically. "Understandest thou?"

"I understand. Speak, relieve my anxiety. The maiden, where is she?"

"Within an inner chamber."

"Safe and well?"

"Perfectly. What knowest thou of the affair?"

"I know that she went out last night with a certain slave of mine—for whom a crucifix shall be made ready on my return—that he became familiar with her, and that as he sought to kiss her a certain mob interposed and tore her from him, striking him down. Before they knocked him senseless he heard them propose to toss her in a blanket. After that I know nothing."

"Thou shalt hear from her own lips," said Paulus, "what further happened to her. Summon Rebekah

and the maiden, my son," he added in Hebrew to the Jewish lad.

"Instantly at thy will," answered the boy, turning toward a hall which gave entrance to the inner chambers of the apartment.

"Hath not thine appeal been heard yet?" asked Attilius as he waited.

"My case hath been heard before the pretorian prefects by appointment of the Emperor, and they have both adjudged me innocent."

"But thou art not free?"

"Nero hath a desire to hear me in mine own defence before he signeth the order for my release."

"When shall that be?"

"I know not. The Cæsar is busy and troubled with many things. A poor prisoner like myself must await his pleasure," answered Paulus, smiling. "We write no more this morning, my son," he said to the young man at the table. "Engross upon the parchments what I have already dictated, I will complete the letter on the morrow."

The young man at the table, who had evidently been writing at Paulus' dictation, bowed reverently, gathered up his paper, his ink-horn and pen of reed, and withdrew from the room.

"I shall make interest with the Emperor, with whom I am in favour," said Attilius, "to secure thee a speedy hearing and thy freedom from his galling and most irksome bondage."

"For my work's sake, thou wilt do well," replied Paulus gravely, "but——"

At this moment the hangings over one of the doorways were drawn apart; an aged woman, habited after the manner of the Hebrews, appeared within the entrance. She stepped aside and disclosed to the young patrician the form and face of Gwenna, his slave.

"Gwenna!" cried Attilius, forgetful of Paulus and Lucas, the pretorian, and all else.

He stepped forward quickly with extended arms.

"Lord!" exclaimed Gwenna, shrinking back against the wall. "Is it thou, in truth, or thy spirit?"

"Flesh and blood," answered Attilius, smiling in gladness.

"I thought thou wert far away. Paulus wrote to Pheidippides——"

"I came back to Rome this morning, the gods be praised, only to receive the news that thou wert gone. Couldst thou have known the shock it was to me not to receive the welcome of thy blue eyes when I entered my atrium! When I looked over the assemblage thou wert not there."

"Chide me not," said Gwenna.

The colour came and went in her face, her bosom heaved, her heart throbbed, her breast was full of strange emotions, for clad in his war panoply the magnificent youth looked like one of the young gods which, in his desultory way, he worshipped perfunctorily, more as a matter of habit than otherwise.

"I have no reproaches for thee," said Attilius gently.

"Thou hast well said," interposed Paulus. "I know this maiden; she is a woman for any man to respect and care for."

"Hast thou converted her to that God of thine?"

"Praised be the name of Christus, I have," answered Paulus instantly. "I know well that although we Christians are spoken against in Rome, I am safe in confiding in thee."

"In thy turn, thou hast well said, wise Paulus, for I am bound to thee and Lucas for my life. But enough of that at present. I care not what religion the maiden believeth, so she is mine."

"She is still thy slave," answered Paulus. "She hath learned to be content in that state of life in which it hath pleased God to call her."

"And hast thou taught her that?"

"That and more."

"I shall inquire further into this," said Attilius, "but now I must know how she came hither and what befell her in the night."

"Thou hast heard?" said Gwenna, and it was evident that the lessons of Eurotas had borne fruit, for she spoke Greek as well as did Attilius himself, although he did not notice it at the time.

"I have heard about the wretch, Zoilus, from whom a bitter penalty shall be exacted."

"What penalty, lord?"

"I shall give him into thy hands. Thou shalt say the word. He shall be flayed alive, or flogged to death, or crucified, but of that presently. Tell me of thyself."

"There is but little to tell. When Zoilus put his arm around me and would fain have kissed me, which I resisted——"

"Thou dost not care for such as he?" asked Attilius anxiously.

"I regard him no more than any of thine other slaves who might come to my call," answered the woman proudly.

"Thou dost forget," said Paulus gently, "that thou, thyself, art in bondage," whereat Gwenna, thus recalled, flushed painfully, "and even the humblest slave is in Christ a brother to us all," continued the old man.

"Proceed, maiden. And of thy courtesy interrupt her not, Paulus," said the tribune impatiently. "I am consumed with anxiety."

"As he drew me to him we were set on by a mob of men, cloaked, their faces hidden. One of them said I was meet for my betters, another seized me and dragged my cloak from me. I heard a voice saying that I should be tossed in a blanket."

"The dog!" cried Attilius, clenching his hand. "I shall seek him through the length and breadth of Rome, and he and his shall pay for this outrage."

"Wait," said the young woman. "As I struggled and screamed, I tore off the covering from the face of one of them."

"Wouldst thou know that face?"

"I am not likely to forget it," answered Gwenna, shuddering.

"Hadst thou ever seen it before?"

"Never, except upon a coin."

"Cæsar!" exclaimed Attilius. "Ye gods!"

"It was he," answered Gwenna. "It was he who had me by the arm, and, my master, I am a brave woman

and no coward, but the blood in my veins turned to water."

"Beast!" cried Attilius harshly. "No one shall take thee from me; no, not even though he sitteth upon the throne."

"For a moment I struggled and screamed. Just as I had begun to despair, the street, which had been deserted, was suddenly filled with men. They were unarmed, but they threw themselves upon the group, snatching me away, and, by the suddenness of their onslaught, forcing the others back. Lanterns were carried by some of my assailants. They were knocked down, trampled upon, and extinguished. He who held me was forced to release me. He was sent reeling to the pavement by some blow. The place was in darkness. There were soldiers in the background, but before they could come up it was all over. Some one caught me by the arm, whispered words in my ear, and, following his guidance, I ran. I am young and strong and fleet of foot. Before the people who had attacked us could relight their lanterns, summon their soldiers, and gather their wits, the multitude had disappeared as rapidly as it had assembled. He who caught me led me here. I was afraid to return home that night, and in the morning I feared to go back lest I should be punished for being a runaway. And I was afraid to go again into the streets."

"Now by the immortal gods," cried Attilius, "the man who laid lash in punishment upon thy tender skin would sign his death warrant."

"But thou wert not there," answered Gwenna, "and

how could I know? The honoured and beloved Paulus promised to plead with Pheidippides that he would hold me without punishment for my unauthorised absence until thy return."

"Paulus," said Attilius, "it will be two years soon since thou didst save my life, thou and Lucas yonder. And by thy wise counsel and thy prayers to thy God thou didst save the lives of all upon the ship. That was much. Thou shalt see that a Roman is not ungrateful, by the gods, but when thou didst save my woman yonder"—What had changed Gwenna that no such wild revolt rose in her soul at these words as would have developed a year or more agone?—"thou didst lay me under greater obligations, so great that I know not how to discharge them."

"It was not I that saved thy maiden," Paulus answered. "I did but receive her here and write the letter."

"Never was missive more acceptable than that," said the tribune. "But tell me, Gwenna—all is not clear—who were these people who rescued thee, how did they come, and why did they interest themselves in thee?"

"My lord," began the maiden.

She hesitated and looked at Paulus.

"Speak on," said the old man.

"Doth my slave require thy permission to answer me?" flashed out Attilius, his proud spirit quick to take offence.

Paulus smiled at him.

"How short is thy memory!"

"Thy pardon," said Attilius. "Speak on."

"They were Christians, lord," said Gwenna, "poor people, slaves, artisans, workmen——"

"And art thou, too, a Christian?"

"When Paulus thinks me worthy I shall be baptised."

"And dost thou believe in this crucified God?"

"Yes, lord," answered the maiden simply, "I believe."

"And dost thou, a princess of the Iceni, consort with slaves and freedmen and workmen?"

"Thou dost forget, lord, that I, too, am a slave."

"And mine," cried Attilius.

"And thine," answered Gwenna, crossing her hands once again over her breast.

"By the gods!" exclaimed the Roman exultantly. "I never knew what that meant until to-day. I have been blind."

He stepped nearer to her, his eyes shining, strangely oblivious to the presence of Paulus and Lucas, to everything but that the woman before him was beautiful and his own. Men had sought her, slaves had seen and loved her, the Emperor himself had laid hands upon her, and he, Caius Attilius, owned her! He caught her by the arm, drew her to him.

"Come with me," he said. "My domus awaiteth its mistress."

"Lord, lord," she whispered, "for Christus' sake," her face suddenly as white as the under tunic whose edges could be seen beneath the blue colour of the outer garment that she wore.

"And what is He to me or thee?" cried Attilius. "Thou art mine, and——"

"Noble Attilius," said Paulus, bravely stepping forward. He caught Attilius with one hand, the maiden with the other; the chain clinked in the faces of both of them. With strength surprising in one so old he slowly forced them apart. "This must not be."

"And speakest thou so to me?" cried Attilius furiously. "Shall I not do what I like with mine own?"

"I am a man born under the law," said Paulus as the tribune, ashamed for the moment of his outburst, relaxed his hold on the maiden's arm, "and I have been proud of my Roman citizenship. I will do nothing to forfeit it. This human bondage is for so short a while that I have therefore always bidden the slaves render better service and always to endure, for Christ's sake, their servitude."

"Well, then," began Attilius.

"I cannot argue with thee," said Paulus. "Thou hast the law on thy side, but thou didst say a moment since, and swear it by thy gods, that certain gratitude was due to me, and to Lucas yonder, for some slight service rendered thee and thy handmaid."

"And so I did."

"Well, there is a request I would make of thee."

"What wouldst thou have?" asked Attilius as Paulus paused.

"That thou shouldst respect this maiden, of whom thou art the master, as thy sister or thy wife."

Attilius stared at him.

"Thou askest much," he began hoarsely. "Take money. A hundred thousand sesterces I paid for this woman. I will buy her from thee again for twice the price."

"Thy money perish with thee," said Paulus severely. "Thinkest thou that thou canst pay in money for a maiden's honour—and to me?" His voice rose like thunder, and the sonorous Greek rolled from him with Homeric force. "This is thy gratitude," he cried, "this is the measure of dependence upon the word of a Roman? Why do I prize a citizenship which is exemplified by——"

"Peace," said the abashed tribune sternly. "Thou hast thy wish. The maiden shall be held inviolate. Thou hast my word. Know, O Hebrew, that when I pass it I keep it even to my hurt."

"And thou hast done well. There is that in this woman which any man might delight to honour."

"It was a passing madness," said Attilius for the sake of his pride, forcing the pretence to his lips. He was looking at Paulus and did not see Gwenna start at the phrase. "I have women enough in my household at my command."

Paulus shook his head.

"I would have thee hold all women——"

"Stop!" said the tribune. "Thy request hath been granted. My gratitude covereth no more."

Paulus bowed and turned away. He knew when the limit had been reached. It was, he realised, a great thing that he had exacted from the tribune.

"Come," said the Roman to the woman.

But she turned and shrank near to the side of the Hebrew.

"Thou mayest go without hesitation," said the aged Paulus. "He hath given his word, and as I know the man he will keep it."

"I thank thee, Hebrew, for thy assurance," said Attilius proudly. "I am still in thy debt, it seems. What can I do further for thee?"

"Nothing," answered Paulus, "and yet, wilt thou hear a word of counsel from me?"

"I will hear."

"Be kindly affectioned to all dependent upon thee, especially those of thy household who call thee master and lord."

"Ask the slaves of my familia if I am a cruel master and a hard."

"Gentleness doth there abound, beloved Paulus," answered Gwenna quickly. "Until last night no hand was lifted against me, no voice spoke harshly, no one ever attempted the least familiarity, save Zoilus."

"And he shall pay; oh, how he shall pay!" cried Attilius.

"What meanest thou to do with him?" asked Paulus.

"His fate is in the maiden's hands; she shall choose, —crucifixion, flaying alive, or——"

"Let him be crucified," said Gwenna fiercely.

"My daughter," said the Hebrew, "is this the result of the teaching thou hast heard?"

"The wretch laid his hands upon me and sought to press his lips to mine."

"Thou must forgive him even as God for Christ's sake forgave us."

"But I am no follower of thy meek, forgiving Christus," interposed Attilius quickly.

"Did I not hear thee say his punishment was in the maiden's hands?"

"There are some things which no woman ought to forgive. I trust her to fix his punishment. Speak, Gwenna."

"Hast thou never heard what the Lord said to Peter when he asked how many times his enemies should be forgiven?" persisted Paulus.

Gwenna nodded.

"'Seventy times seven,'" she whispered.

"As thou seekest baptism——"

"Speak, speak," said Attilius.

"For his transgressions the man must be punished," answered the maiden thoughtfully, "but not unto death, neither crucifixion nor flagellation. Let him no longer be cellarer. It was drink—the wine—that was the undoing of him. Send him to work in thy fields. I will forgive him." She turned to Paulus. "Say I not well?"

"Well indeed," answered the old man approvingly.

"Thou art mad, mad," protested Attilius angrily, resentful also that the influence of Paulus over this slave was greater than his own, "but thou hast chosen. So be it. Now we will go home. Paulus and Lucas,

farewell. Should ye need me, ask and ye shall receive my assistance."

"Farewell, noble Attilius," said Lucas.

"Farewell, beloved young man," said Paulus, lifting his hand and making a cross in the air. "I have great hopes for thee."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRIBUNE DEALS WITH TWO WOMEN

Caius Attilius was not at all satisfied with himself or his situation. He felt, first of all, that he had demeaned himself unworthily by his passionate outburst in the apartment of his Hebrew friend, and his self-respect was impaired accordingly. Then he was convinced that Paulus had taken advantage of the obligation which the tribune had so willingly acknowledged by exacting such a return for it. Naturally he did not relish the fact that he was bound in any way and prevented from doing what he would with his own. The mere existence of the prohibition made him the more eager to break it, but he was a Roman and a man of honour—his word was, in truth, his bond. That he could not see how to break it, that he could see no way of discharging the obligation in some other way and leaving himself free to possess himself of Gwenna, maddened him. He was passionately in love with her already, although not in the noblest way. But he could do nothing unless he could get a release from his obligation from Paulus, which he reluctantly decided was so unlikely as to be impossible. Every way he saw an impasse. And the thought of marrying her never occurred to the young patrician. He craved her terribly, yet he could not have her. These thoughts put

him in a worse humour than ever. He was not used to being balked of his desire.

He stalked along wrathfully and in silence. Gwenna followed equally silently to one side and a little back of him as became her humble station, the slaves bringing up the rear. His growing ill-humour was so obvious that she did not venture to interrupt him by speech. Indeed, her own feelings since the moment he had sought to clasp her in his arms in that upper chamber had been of the most varied and tumultuous character. One moment she longed to be there again on any terms, another she raged against the cool, unquestioning proprietorship with which he had seized her, the brutal frankness with which he made clear his ownership of her. How dared he! Why had he not; though——

Generally her heart was throbbing wildly at being with him once more. She had heard his praises sung throughout the year by old Lais, his foster-mother; by Eurotas, the private philosopher of the household; by Pheidippides, the freedman who supervised all. These were all devoted to him. He had made a deep impression upon her. She had spent long hours thinking of him as she prepared herself for the position he had indicated she should occupy. He had never seemed so splendid to her as he had that morning. The poor woman was torn this way and that by conflicting emotions. She loved and she hated. She admired and she loathed. Her heart was free and bound.

She had nothing to hope for save through him, nothing to expect but of his pleasure. She was a slave.

She had come now to realise all that was involved in that station—the absoluteness of his command of her. Such a disgrace as would be involved in marrying her she knew would be beyond Roman ideas. Paulus had safeguarded her for the moment, but for how long? To be his in any way than as wife was a thing she could not endure for a moment. And yet, to be his at all! The barbaric passion of her wild race, but half controlled by the Christian principles dimly apprehended as yet, ran riot in her veins at the thought.

She stole a look at the black brow of Attilius. In spite of herself the consciousness came to her that she had but to lay her hand upon his shoulder and whisper a word or two to bring back light and joy to him who had been her protector. Yet she could not speak the word or give the touch. Perhaps it was the grave figure of old Paulus that stood between them. His hands had forced them apart. A year ago she might have given herself freely, although she had died even then rather than be enforced—she would have killed herself before that—but now it was different. What she had learned of the Nazarene had made her see some things differently when she thought upon them. What she might do in some tempestuous outburst of passionate abandonment and despair she could not tell.

It was a very miserable maiden that walked along the Via Sacra toward the Aventine that morning, and yet, miserable as she was, she would not have changed places with any one, for Attilius was there and she loved him. And she would not have been a woman at

all had she not realised that she stood for something much dearer, that she meant something much more precious than all the other slaves of his household to the young soldier to whom she had given her heart.

Climbing the slopes of the streets that wound up the hill the two, with their attendants, found the doorway of Attilius' house blocked by a crowd of people surrounding an empty litter richly caparisoned, which the insolent Nubian slaves who bore it had deposited upon the pavement and then lolled lazily upon the handles. Attilius stared at it with some annoyance, his brow blacker than ever. He was in no mood for company. He had not got things straightened out in his own mind yet. What was to be his future relation to the lovely woman walking by his side was not yet clear, and although he was master in every sense of the word, yet since he had been constrained by Paulus' demand he could not decide the question for himself; the woman had to be consulted. He was hot, tired, physically as well as mentally and spiritually. He craved the luxurious bath upon which the Romans so depended. He wanted those clean, fresh garments to which he had looked forward. He desired to be alone to think these things out and then to have her before him to talk things over.

And here was a stranger awaiting him in the atrium, and the visitor, by the look of the gorgeously decorated litter, was somebody of rank evidently who could not easily be put aside. How had his arrival become known so early? Why could he not be left alone until he indicated his desire to receive his friends? Ignoring

the greeting of the porter at the door therefore, and giving no heed to the explanation he began to make, the tribune stalked into the atrium followed by the rest. Only the ordinary attendants were there. The curtain covering the passageway to the peristyle and garden beyond was drawn aside and fastened back. He heard voices beyond the arch in the garden. His visitor had evidently gone there.

Without deigning to speak to the people in the atrium he strode down the passageway into the peristyle and stared through the marble columns at the fountain in the lovely garden beyond. Gwenna, having received no orders to the contrary, naturally accompanied him. The tribune in his armour and the woman in that tunic of blue, which she always insisted upon wearing because he had approved of it when first she put it on, were well matched. They might have stood for Mars and Venus, for golden Gwenna was hardly less nobly proportioned than Attilius. The year had ripened, rounded, and developed her. She had all the freshness of youth, but it was youth just budding into complete and perfect womanhood. She carried herself not at all like a slave, which was one reason why Attilius liked her.

The eyes that were turned upon the young tribune, however, were not especially prepossessed with one of the pair; yet the woman in the garden, who looked at them across the basin of the fountain, recognised in the newcomer charms that surpassed hers as much as they differed from them. The lady Lollia Claudia was not without a certain undeniable beauty of her own.

Measured by Roman standards she was well-nigh perfect. Her eyes were dark, her hair glowing brown, her complexion warm olive, her features perfect. Her dress was rich, daring, even barbaric in its crimson colour. Jewels blazed upon her arms, about her neck, upon her ankles, at the crossed lacings of her sandals, and at her girdle. Although she was a head shorter than Gwenna she bore herself with a more than royal dignity. Not for nothing did the blood of the Claudii run in her veins.

She smiled at Attilius as he stood staring, almost bewildered, at her. With consummate care she had taken her place by the fountain, where she was certain she would look her best. The awning had not yet been spread, and the bright morning sunlight was reflected from every gold and silver tissue, from every gem that she wore. That she did not disdain or fear the revelations of the Italian sun was proof of the naturalness of her colour and the genuineness of her beauty.

"Greeting to the noble Attilius," she began in an exquisitely trained and modulated voice.

"Greeting to the beautiful Lollia," was the answer somewhat grudgingly given.

"Let me see," said Lollia, her eyes narrowing as she looked at him. "It is a year and four months since we exchanged words. Methinks that there is something lacking in my welcome."

"Thou hast surprised me," said Attilius bluntly.

"By my presence?"

He longed to say yes, but remnants of discretion withheld him.

"By thy beauty, lady. Coming from the shadow of the atrium to see thee in the sunlight hath somewhat dazzled my eyes."

"Prettily said for a soldier," returned Lollia. "This woman," she looked insolently at Gwenna, and the latter returned stare for stare, "who is she?"

"She is a——" Attilius hesitated. "She is of my household," he said at last.

"A freedwoman?"

Now the situation was terrible for Gwenna. It only needed the presence of Lollia, whom she had never seen before, to enable her to recognise her own feelings for Attilius. The British woman was suddenly conscious of her slavery and of her passion at the same time. It is to be feared that she quite forgot to be a Christian under the circumstances. At heart she was every whit as proud as the daughter of the Claudii.

"Well, why art thou silent? What is this woman to thee?"

"She is a slave whom I purchased the day before I left for Lusitania."

"A pretty plaything!"

"I am no man's plaything!" burst out Gwenna, her fiery temper ablaze.

"How darest thou speak to me, woman?" cried Lollia.

"Silence!" thundered Attilius, and whether he meant his injunction for the one woman or for the other was not quite clear.

"Go, slave," said Lollia insolently, "I would have speech with thy master alone."

"To my own master I stand or fall," said Gwenna. "Until he bid me go, I remain."

"Wilt thou allow me to order mine own household?" said Attilius, turning to the patrician. "Thou art not yet domina of this familia," he continued.

At this, it must be confessed, cutting remark, Lollia flushed painfully.

"Vay," she said imperiously, "and let me pass. Not now or ever would I consider thy suit. I leave thee to thy——"

She flashed at Gwenna as she advanced toward the passageway a bitter, common word.

A maiden of less gentle spirit would have been crushed by it. Not so Gwenna. Forgetful of everything but the outrage and insult she stepped forward, fiercely resentful, but Lollia, too, had all the courage and fire of her race and family.

"If thou dost lay the weight of thy finger upon me," she said, "I will cause thee to be flogged to death, and not even thy lover can protect thee. I have but to whisper to the Emperor——"

And indeed she did not underrate her influence with Nero, although Caius Attilius knew nothing about it, much less the cause of it.

"This is madness," he cried, interposing between the two. "Gwenna, go thou instantly to Lais. I will send for thee later when I require thy services. Enough," he said curtly as the poor woman started to speak.

Mastering her desires at his behest, and it was evidence of her feeling for him that she could do so, Gwenna bowed low before him.

"I obey thee," she said, and turned away and swept haughtily down the peristyle toward the quarters of the women slaves upon the other side of the garden.

"That," said Lollia, "was a timely dismissal, Caius Attilius. Another word and plighted troth had been broken forever between us."

Indeed, had Lollia been all that she seemed, what had passed already had sufficed for that, but, truth to tell, she was anxious to marry. Her character and career were known to all in Rome save to Attilius, who was a stranger; and there was something in the character of the man which made it a dangerous thing even to hint that the woman whom he honoured with his affections was unworthy of them. Lollia knew this as well as anybody. She was broken in fortune as well as in reputation. Attilius was her last chance. He stood, as it were, between her and ruin, and she could not lightly cast him off. Yet had she consulted her inclinations in the presence of what she believed, she would have struck him in the face and thrown him aside. The affront conveyed by the woman Gwenna had been almost more than could be borne by her proud Roman soul. In one way indeed it had intensified her determination to marry Attilius, for when she was mistress of his household this blue-eyed, yellow-haired British woman would be made to suffer.

She therefore assumed a sweet meekness. She drew near to Attilius, laid her hand upon his arm, and looked up into his face. Her graceful head only came to his shoulder. She smiled upon him tenderly, and when she smiled she could look very attractive indeed.

Attilius had seen that smile before. It had formerly a great effect upon his impressionable nature, more impressionable, perhaps, because he had been so long withdrawn from such society as Rome afforded, but this time he was singularly unresponsive to it. Time was when he would have thrilled at her proximity, at her caressing gesture, at her inviting, not to say languishing, look, but these now left him cold and untouched.

Truth to tell, his heart was hot within him. He was full of anger against Paulus and full of desire for Gwenna. He had resented the presence of Lollia in the first instance, and the scene which had just then been enacted had not diminished that resentment. And yet it was not in him to be a boor in her presence. Vicious she might be, but he did not know that, and she was certainly graceful and charming whatever her character. Thought of marrying Gwenna had never entered Attilius' head, yet matrimony was a condition for which he had prepared himself. He was the last of his house; the perpetuation of his family was laid upon him as a duty. Lollia Claudia was high-born and beautiful enough—though not for a moment to be compared to Gwenna in his eyes—her other disabilities were not known to him. He felt he could scarcely do better. He really imagined at that moment that, deprived of Gwenna, he hated all women, that it was more or less a matter of indifference so far as affection went, and therefore Lollia would do as well as another.

By the code of Roman society, as he very well knew, Lollia had been treated abominably; that a slave woman should have dared to lift her eyes to her, much less to

address her as an equal, was unheard of. The tribune could not but justify in his secret heart the resentment of Gwenna, yet he was forced to condemn it. In a mood akin to despair he forced himself to smile upon his fair companion.

Really, thought the Roman woman, when he smiled the rather grim sternness of his bearing was instantly lightened. She had long since passed the sentimental stage of life, but even her battered, calloused heart experienced a slight thrill of admiration as she looked up at the tall, haughty young patrician who bent over her.

"Thou hast been treated with gross disrespect," he said. "I shall deal with that slave woman later," he added mendaciously.

"Have her flogged for me, dear Caius Attilius," said the woman softly. "I marvel what thou seest in such washed-out, pale-faced humanity."

"Let us talk no longer of her," said the tribune shortly.

He did not intend for one moment to have Gwenna flogged, and his promised dealing committed him to nothing. For the matter of that she ought to be punished for not falling into his arms, for having permitted Paulus to interfere, and some of his anger found vent in these words.

"Art thou glad to return to me?" asked Lollia, coming closer.

There were slaves in the garden, but to the Romans slaves counted no more than blocks of wood or stone. The obvious was expected, and Attilius did not dis-

appoint the woman. His arm went around her waist. He bent his head and kissed her. This was comparatively a new experience to Attilius, an old one to Lollia. It was the man who blushed and not the woman. This was not a common woman in his eyes, and it never occurred to Attilius that many others had made free with her lips without rebuke.

"And didst thou dream of me in the camp and in the field?" she whispered, returning his caress.

Attilius was an honourable man; he was not fond of deceit; evasion even, much more plain lying, appalled him, but in the circumstances in which he found himself there was no alternative. He lied like a gentleman. Lollia would have mocked at what she would have called his squeamishness if she had known it. But the tribune was too new to Rome and the court to have learned to be a ready liar. Truth to tell, he had scarcely given Lollia a thought, but what was he to say? He nodded his head, and, taking advantage of her willingness, for she made not the slightest motion to release herself—indeed she nestled closer to him—he kissed her again, entirely ignorant of the fact that, through the hangings behind which she had retired, poor Gwenna, eavesdropping, with no compunctions of conscience at all under the circumstances, was a spectator to the whole performance. What were her feelings at the sight it is not difficult to imagine. She had hated Lollia before and she hated her more, if possible, now.

"I have done an unmaidenly thing," said Lollia at last demurely, drawing away from him and dropping her eyes, wishing at the same time that she could

blush like her lover, "in coming here to thy house. Thou shouldst have sought me first."

"I have but this morning returned from Gaul," said Attilius honestly. "It was my fixed purpose to see thee after midday. I knew thy delicate habit did not admit of disturbance by callers before the noon hour."

"Yes," said Lollia gently, "that is my practice, but when my freedman learned from one who was present at thine audience with Cæsar this morning that thou hadst returned, and communicated the news to me, I was so anxious to see thee that I threw prudence and propriety to the winds. It was unmaidenly. What must thou think of me?"

This was a hard question to answer, for Attilius was not thinking of Lollia at all. He had made up his mind to marry her as she stood there, but he wanted to get away from her now. He was distrait, preoccupied, and the woman who was wise in her way and experienced in her dealings with men at last detected it.

"Thou art weary from thy journey," she said softly; "I will leave thee. Wilt thou dine with my father to-night?"

"Gladly," said Attilius, and his desire to get rid of her lent emphasis to his tone so that even she was deceived by it.

"There will be but few guests," continued the woman, "and thou canst imagine with what anxiety I shall wait for thine arrival."

"An anxiety that cannot possibly match mine own," returned the tribune gallantly.

"Wilt thou conduct me to my litter, then?" returned

Lollia, slipping her hand into his own, and thus he led her through the garden and into the passageway—whence the flying Gwenna had barely escaped before them—then through the atrium, seeing her at last safely bestowed within the litter. He pressed a kiss upon her hands, and left her with promises of meeting in the evening.

Scarcely had her cortège turned the corner and he had ceased to be under her observation than he turned and walked rapidly into the house. Gwenna met him in the atrium. Her fair face was flushed, her hands were clenched, her blue eyes filled with indignant tears. Her foot tapped uneasily upon the pavement. She was beautiful as always, more beautiful in her indignation, perhaps, than ordinarily, but Attilius had no eyes for her beauty. He had been irritated beyond measure by the assumption which had been forced upon him by the advances of Lollia. The sight of Gwenna increased his agitation. He did not intend to be cross-questioned by a slave. There was no such reason for dissimulation in this case as had been in the other. For the first time he spoke to her harshly.

"What doest thou in the atrium?" he demanded.

"Master!" exclaimed the woman, surprised almost out of her resentment, for her slavery had sat but lightly upon her shoulders heretofore.

"Get thee gone," said Attilius harshly, "into thy quarters where thou belongest. When I have need of thee I shall send for thee."

But Gwenna, unable to comprehend this strange change, stood as if rooted to the floor.

Her apparent noncompliance with his wishes aroused Attilius to fury. He stamped his foot upon the pavement.

"Dost thou hesitate when I command?" he cried. "Wouldst thou have the lash laid upon thy naked shoulders? Dost thou not hear me? Go, and be thankful that thou art not whipped for thine insolence to Lollia Claudia a moment since."

For a second the amazed woman confronted him, unsubdued and unawed, but when he raised his hand and started toward her passionately she shot a swift look at him and turned and fled before the threat of physical menace in his air and bearing. And Caius Attilius was very sorry, as the hangings fell behind the blue tunic, that she was gone. He was as miserable as a wealthy young man in good health, distinguished by the favour of the Emperor, beloved apparently by a noble and high-born lady, and possessed of the most beautiful slave in Rome could well be. And she? In her own cubicle she threw herself upon her couch and sobbed as if her heart were broken.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FORGOTTEN PROMISE

Caius Attilius had spent a very miserable morning. He thought bitterly of all the disturbing events of the day before; the startling disappearance of Gwenna, her speedy recovery, the sudden gust of passion which had swept him from his feet as he sought to take her in his arms, the extraordinary interference of Paulus, the ill-timed visit of Lollia, his brutal treatment of Gwenna. The favour of Nero, his promised preferment to a legateship, and his prospective appointment to a command under Corbulo made no difference to him. His meditations were shot through with deep anxiety centring on Nero and the possible interest he might take in Gwenna. How closely had the drunken Emperor and his satellites, playing their mad pranks in the streets of Rome, observed the maiden? Would they recognise her again? Had she impressed him sufficiently to cause Cæsar to seek for her? What should the tribune do if Nero learned that Gwenna belonged to him and made a demand upon him for her? Paulus had exacted a promise that he would respect and protect her. Was he to preserve her purity simply to turn her over to the infamous, bestial, brutal, degraded Cæsar at his command in the end? Perish the thought! Attilius would kill her rather, and the maiden would thank him for the act when she knew.

And then the prospective dinner to which he was bidden by Lollia for that night did not add to his satisfaction. Such a dinner under such circumstances would almost amount to a formal betrothal. Though he felt constrained to marry her because of her evident desire and because of her fitness, as he believed, and because he had in a measure committed himself to that course, he was not blind to the fact that his heart cherished not one spark of affection for the woman. He had thought that he loved her, but since Gwenna had come into his life he realised what love truly was.

He had told Lollia that he had often thought of her over the campfire. In truth she had scarcely ever crossed his imagination. But Gwenna—he had dwelt upon her, dreamed of her, communed with his soul about her, idealised her, of course. And unconsciously he had grown to love her. It was for her, not Nero, that he had made such breakneck speed through Italy on his return journey. And when he did not find her to greet him as he stepped across his threshold that fact was the precipitation of his passion. He knew then that he loved her.

Loving her under ordinary circumstances, he had but to take her as he, like his kind, took anything he fancied; but now that stern old Hebrew had interfered. Well, Attilius passionately resolved upon his course: he would marry Lollia and take Gwenna in some way. The one thing was easy, the other hard, but he would wrest from old Paulus release from his proudly given promise in one way or another; meanwhile he was hot, uncomfortable, and very tired.

He clapped his hands and bade some one prepare a bath for him. A bath then was a luxury, and it was a serious and protracted process as indulged in by the Romans. It was the more agreeable to Attilius because he found it a novelty since the camp and the field did not provide facilities for enjoying the practice. He lingered long. It was high noon before, vested in a new tunic of spotless white, with its broad senatorial stripe, he partook of his midday meal.

He had bid the porter deny him that day to all comers on the plea of desiring to recover from the fatigues of his journey. His clients had got wind of his arrival, but they had been received with scant ceremony by Syfax, who dismissed them curtly and bade them present themselves on the morrow. Attilius dined alone therefore. He much wished for the company of old Regulus, but the worthy knight could not possibly return from Brundisium before the end of the week. After dining the tribune repaired to his library, threw himself upon a couch, and bade some one summon Eurotas to read to him. In answer to this summons Pheidippides presented himself in the library.

"Lord," he said, "thou hast forgot in the happenings of the day that Eurotas is ill and unable to leave his bed. I did not allow thy summons to be brought to him. Knowing his loyalty I feared he would make the effort to attend upon thine order even to his hurt."

"Thou hast done well," said Attilius, "although it is unfortunate that Eurotas is ill when I need him most."

"Hast thou also forgot British Gwenna, lord?"

"And what of her?" asked Attilius, who had by no means forgot British Gwenna and who knew perfectly well the purport of Pheidippides' question.

"She hath studied faithfully with thy philosopher, and I make no doubt could read to thee acceptably if thou shouldst say the word."

"Send her to me," said the tribune, growling, but delighted beyond measure at the turn of events.

In a few moments Gwenna appeared before him, where he half reclined upon the couch, his hands clasped behind his head. She stood erect after a gentle salutation. Attilius regarded her with all the insolence of his race and station, and if there was anything in the way of insolence that these things could beget and which even the rudest could infuse in his look, Attilius did not know what they were. As usual, it was she who broke the silence.

"Thou hast sent for me, lord," she said, her voice trembling a little in spite of herself.

"Thine eyes are red," began the tribune irrelevantly. "Hast thou wept?"

"I have."

"See that it doth not occur again. I like about me smiling faces, not frowning brows. Smile upon me, woman. Laugh."

"How can I smile when my lord is wroth with his slave?"

"Is it the old story that thou repinest because thou art a slave?"

"No, but thine anger—I could better bear the lash, with which thou hast threatened me, than——"

"Enough of that," said Attilius with a brutal manner he did not feel. "I have no interest in thy feelings, but I like not sadness. There is enough of it abroad without bringing it into my domus. Thou hast studied with Eurotas?"

"I have sought in every way to bow to thy will," said the woman.

"Ah, most meek of women, I have not observed it!" mocked the Roman sarcastically. "But let me try thee. Take one of the rolls."

"Which one, lord?"

"Any that thou dost fancy. Then sit thou here, by my side, and read."

Poor heart-bruised Gwenna turned and walked unsteadily to the bookcase, opened the door, and selected from one of the many pigeonholes a roll of parchment whose ivory tablet depending from its carved staff indicated one of the books of Homer; which book the woman was too nervous and excited to apprehend. It did not matter. They were all great, and she loved the thunderous and sonorous roll of the majestic Greek of the master poet. Closing the door she drew a low stool to within a short distance of the couch and prepared to sit down.

"Nearer," said Attilius, watching her closely.

She drew a little nearer.

"Closer still, where I can touch thee if I am so minded."

"Lord," whispered the woman, "I am afraid."

But in obedience to an imperious gesture of the tribune she drew the stool close beside the couch and

sat down, hastily opened the roll, and began to read. She read falteringly and stumblingly at first. If she had glanced up from the manuscript and had seen the mocking smile on the face of Attilius her confusion would have been complete, but she fixed her attention steadily upon the manuscript and forced herself to do better.

Presently the noble numbers overcame her timidity. She straightened herself, lifted her head, and poured forth in ringing tones the great verses, many of which she knew by heart. Attilius had found it impossible to concentrate his mind upon the reading because of his interest in the reader by his side, but the splendid poetry, as interpreted by the maiden, took possession of him also presently. He rose upon one elbow and listened, his eyes gleaming. She read for a long time, and coming to the end of the book she stopped and looked at him.

The hand of Attilius went out to her and fell upon her shoulders. She shrank beneath his touch, but did not withdraw.

"Lord, lord," she whispered piteously, but Attilius did not heed.

"Closer, closer," he whispered, "thy lips to mine, maiden."

"Master," she begged in fright.

"Nay, not as master but as lover."

He rose to a sitting position, his face close to hers, his arm about her shoulders. She threw her hands up against his breast.

"Thy word," she cried, "thy promise to Paulus!"

"As I am a man," answered Attilius passionately, "I cannot keep it. How dost thou expect me to deny myself in the face of beauty like thine?"

He swept her to him and in another moment pressed his lips full and fair upon her own. It would be false to say that Gwenna did not thrill to the fervid pressure of those masterful lips, and it would not be without the truth to add that for a moment she returned their pressure. But the woman recovered herself before the man. She thrust him from her violently and sprang to her feet. The neglected roll fell between them.

"Shame!" she said.

"Thou didst return my kisses, I swear," cried Attilius, rising in turn.

"Shame, thou word breaker."

"What meanest thou?"

"Thou wert to treat me as a sister, to preserve mine honour and my good name. Didst thou think that I was a Roman woman like that Lollia of thine, whom I saw kiss thee shamelessly in the garden?"

If Attilius had been wise in the ways of women, this would have shown him her true state of feelings. He started to speak, but Gwenna ran on:

"I am alone, helpless, thy slave. I have no will but thine. Were I not a Christian I would kill myself rather than submit to thee, and yet Paulus sayeth—but no, God would bid me choose death rather than dishonour."

"Is there dishonour in my kiss, in my love, for I love thee, British Gwenna, with the red gold in thy hair, with thy fair skin, thine eyes of blue, I love thee. Dost hear? I loved thee from the moment I saw thee

in the courtyard of Phryx, the slave dealer; I loved thee when I bought thee; I loved thee when I talked with thee in the atrium; I loved thee when I bade thee farewell; that kiss of thine upon my rough soldier's hand hath kept it sweet and clean. No other woman hath been aught to me since I saw thee. I love thee. Dost understand? I loved thee in all the weary hours of the far journey. As I rode along the roads I sought speech with no one that I might think of thee. At night I dreamed of thee. For thy sake I spared thy people in that far-off isle of thine. I came back to discharge Nero's command, but really to take thee in my arms. Dost know what love is, what it means? Canst thou not feel it, maiden? Thou art mine, the law hath given thee to me. I bought thee, thou art my slave, mine, praised be the gods, and now this Hebrew interfereth. It is he that hath spoilt thee with that wretched religion that he preacheth. No god shall take thee from me, much less one that is so weak that he can be crucified by a Roman, and a base-born Roman at that. No, not even Cæsar himself or the whole world shall have thee, for thou art mine and I love thee. Hearest thou that?" He came closer to her and seized her again. "Answerest thou nothing? Dost thou not love me? Speak, or by the gods——"

"Caius Attilius," said the woman unsteadily, her bosom heaving with the violence of her emotions, for every passionate word found its echo in her throbbing heart, "had I retained the freedom of my youth, hadst thou met me in lovely Massilia, hadst thou sought me under the mighty oaks of Britain, I would have loved

thee. I would have been thy slave for love of thee, and in honourable wedlock I would have denied thee nothing——"

"Wedlock, marriage!" exclaimed Attilius, starting back in surprise. "Dost thou think, beautiful barbarian, to wed a Roman?"

"Nay, I think nothing," said Gwenna, but by her manner she showed how bitterly she was affronted. "What right have I to mate with thee?"

"None."

"What right have I to object to whatever thou mayst do?"

"None again; thou speakest wisely at last, and——"

"But I do object," blazed out the woman in fierceness which matched his own passion. "Thou hast not enslaved my soul, Caius Attilius, my master and lord. Although I am alone here and in thy power, if thou layest hands upon me without my permission, I shall die with the first weapon that cometh to my hand."

"And thou dost hate me so much as that?" he said with reproach.

"Hate thee, Caius Attilius!" said Gwenna, looking at him, her mood changing with its wonted swiftness. She laid her hand upon her heart. "If thou couldst know how I have thought of thee, how I have worked for thee by day, dreamed of thee by night, longed for thee every hour, if thou couldst understand what is in my sad heart, thou couldst not reproach me thus."

"And thou dost love me?"

"As much as heaven itself, as I love the freedom that is denied me."

"And loving me thus," said Attilius, "thou wilt refuse my arms, withdraw from my kisses?"

"I must."

"And wherefore?"

"Because, were I otherwise, I should be unworthy of thine affections."

"Unworthy?"

"In everything," returned Gwenna stubbornly, "save in my slavery, I am a fit match for thee, for any Roman. In learning? Who among thy acquaintance can compare with me—that Lollia?"

Attilius shook his head.

"In beauty?" she flashed out. "What one of these sun-browned Romans of thine can match me?" she threw her head up and looked at him, every inch a princess, fully conscious of her beauty and charm, "—that Lollia?"

"By the gods, no."

"In purity and cleanliness of soul, in freedom from the brutal and frightful abominations that have made this place the most corrupt in the world—that Lollia?"

"Thou hast that Lollia on thy brain," said Attilius.

"And thou hast her on thy heart."

"Nay, not for a moment."

"And could I return to Britain, tribes of men would come to my call, broad acres are held at my word, riches, barbaric if thou wilt, are mine. I should have then aspired to be thy wife."

"By the gods——"

"There are no gods of the kind thou dost invoke," said Gwenna.

"What then?"

"There is but one God and Jesus Christ is His Son."

"Aye, we Romans crucified Him; we must be greater than that God of thine."

"Thou shalt see."

"And if I take thee?"

"Thou canst ruin my body, but thou canst not defile my soul," answered the woman slowly. "The dagger thrust that lets the life run when thou hast worked thy will upon me sends it clean into the presence of its Redeemer."

"Thou hast spoken like a Roman, and yet I am drunk with love of thee."

"I appeal," said Gwenna quickly, "from Attilius drunk to Attilius sober; I appeal from the cruel, pleasure-loving Roman to the soldier, to the man, whose word is even as his bond."

"Thou dost remind me of my promise?"

"Nay, thy conscience doth remind thee."

Attilius turned away and paced the narrow room with nervous steps.

"Let thy conscience plead for mine," he said at last.

"Lord," said Gwenna gently, "let my love second my plea, for thou hast been good to me, thou and old Paulus; I have but you two to depend upon."

"Enough," said the tribune, having fought a harder battle than any he had ever attempted upon the field. "Thou hast conquered. I am ashamed that I forgot myself, but thou art temptation enough to excuse a stronger man than I."

"There are none stronger, none greater, than thou,"

said Gwenna, coming nearer to him and laying her hand upon his arm.

"Have a care, maiden," said Attilius hoarsely, "tempt me not beyond my strength again."

"I trust thee absolutely," returned the woman, "I trust thee as I love thee. I ask nothing for myself. Marriage, as thou sayest, is impossible between master and slave, but I will serve thee with my life."

"And the lady Lollia? Wilt serve her as well?" asked Attilius cruelly.

"My lord," said Gwenna piteously, "impose not that task upon me."

"Since thou wilt have none of me, Gwenna, I go to her house to-night. The betrothal will be on the morrow and the marriage as soon as she willeth. Thou wilt not find her so kind a mistress as thou hast found me a master," he went on mercilessly.

"Let me go," said the poor woman, white-lipped with pain, at the idea and the thrust.

"Nay," said Attilius, "it is not yet time for my departure. Sit thou down, where thou wilt; thou art not for me, yet read on."

"Yes, lord," whispered Gwenna.

She drew her stool farther away from the couch, upon which Attilius sulkily threw himself again, and reached gropingly for the roll of Homer on the floor.

"Not that," said Attilius, "I have had enough of war and conflict for to-day."

"What, then?"

"Have we no copy of the poems of the divine Sappho in the library?"

"Yes."

"Read them," said the Roman.

It was a long time before Gwenna could command herself sufficiently to read the beautiful love verses in the beautiful Greek with any effect, but the passion therein was accentuated by the emotions in her own soul and she read on and on and on with a breaking heart. Indeed the thrill and feeling found its echo in her own breast and in the breast of the bitter-hearted, disappointed Roman. Finally she stopped.

"I can bear it no longer," she whispered, rising. She threw the roll from her. "Send me to the lash," she said, looking down upon him where he lay smiling evilly at her. "Kill me outright, it would be kinder in the end."

Without another glance she fled from the room, the miserable Attilius making no effort whatever to detain her.

CHAPTER XV

THE TRIBUNE SEEKS RELEASE

The banquet at the home of the senator Publius Claudius, the father of the fair and frail Lollia, was a sumptuous affair, characterised by all the luxury, extravagance, and indecency of the period. In any other state of mind, Attilius might have found in it much to condemn, including the conduct of the lady herself, who exhibited a freedom of speech and bearing not at all in consonance with the rather strait-laced and perhaps unsophisticated ideas of the tribune. But he was in such a mood as to pass over without comment what he would have resented bitterly a few days before. Life did not hold much that was worth living for him as he viewed it then. Nothing greatly mattered after all, he cynically and bitterly concluded, as he went to his house that night.

He more than suspected that the society into which he would be expected to marry was fairly enough represented by Lollia, the full depths of whose moral turpitude he had not yet discovered, although he had begun to suspect a little. Yet he had to marry somebody. Gwenna was out of the question, why not Lollia? If she was no better probably she was no worse than the rest. The decision brought him no comfort. Indeed, he was fairly maddened by it, and in consequence therefore he plunged into reckless dissipations; not such,

however, as had woman for their object; but other vicious pursuits in which he fancied or hoped he could drown his growing melancholy and forget Gwenna.

Even the worldly-wise and experienced Lollia, who had imagined him unsophisticated and innocent to a degree unsurpassed among the young Romans, confessed that she had deceived herself and that Attilius was like the rest after all. There had been a formal betrothal between the two a few days after the dinner, and in this new light in which her lover showed himself, and perhaps because she fancied that the betrothal was binding, she allowed herself a freer rein. Attilius' eyes were gradually opened to her character, and just in proportion as she disclosed herself in her true colours, so did British Gwenna shine brightly in hers.

Meanwhile Attilius saw but little of his slave and his intercourse with her was of the most formal character indeed. He was not often at home and rarely required her services as a reader. When she had put on his toga as he fared forth at night or in the afternoon, her duties were over so far as he was concerned. It was but a simple service which she could perform for him, but how she loved it. It was her one contact with him. There was no one in Rome who could put on a toga better, or more gracefully drape its somewhat complicated and awkward folds, than she. Her white hands lingered caressingly over the vestment, and when Attilius did not observe, her eyes lingered as caressingly upon his face as her fingers upon the toga.

She was very unhappy. She had heard, of course, of the betrothal to Lollia, which was a matter of public

interest, and she had learned a good deal about the mad dissipation into which Attilius plunged. Such matters were common property in the household and were widely discussed by the slaves and freed people. The tribune became a constant frequenter of the Circus, where he laid enormous wagers on the chariots of the faction which he had elected to advocate in the races which took place. He recklessly staked thousands of sesterces upon the turn of the die. Admitted into the closer circle of Nero's intimates, he participated in the drunken orgies which distinguished the feasts of that brute and monster.

But there was a line which Attilius yet drew and which no one had succeeded in inducing him to pass. When the feasters reached the point where every decency was forgotten, Attilius separated from them. Although they mocked him and derided him and some wondered why he was so squeamish and stern, and although in one or two instances he had almost forfeited the regard of the Emperor because he had refused to participate in the ineffable degradations of the rest, he persisted in his course.

And that he did so showed his strength of character. He lost more money than he could by any possibility afford, and he drank more wine than could by any argument be thought good for him, but there were other things he could not do yet. Memory, the ever-present image of a woman, kept him so far clean—golden Gwenna, not dark Lollia. Yet he knew that it was only a question of time and he would fall as low as the lowest.

Gwenna, as she marked the ravages of dissipation, late hours, nervous exhaustion, did not realise that it was thought of her which restrained him from plumbing the very bottom of the abyss. The heart of that maiden yearned toward him. Deprived of other confidant, for she regarded herself as immeasurably above the other slaves of the household, she often had recourse to Paulus, who had made a deep impression upon her. He received her confession in kindly appreciation and sympathy. The old Hebrew had not forgot the wife of his youth, long since dead. He could understand and sympathise with love and youth still. Gwenna also faithfully recounted all that had passed between Attilius and herself, and before Paulus she laid all that she knew about the devastating career into which the young man was so recklessly plunging.

It was cause of great grief to Paulus and Lucas that Attilius should so demean himself. They had a wide and accurate knowledge, through long observation, of the enormities and wickednesses into which the rich and vicious of Rome and the world descended, and they had hoped and prayed many times that the clean, upright, splendid young soldier might be saved from such a course. It must be that they had prayed in vain. There could be but one end to a career such as Attilius had embarked upon—the complete, total, and absolute breakdown of the moral nature of the man. And that appeared imminent indeed. What could be done?

Paulus knew the Roman mind thoroughly, he knew the Roman pride and temper. He knew Gwenna, too, and her pride and temper as well. She had not spent

long hours in converse with him without revealing the character of her soul. Both woman and man were unyielding. He had hoped by the prohibition which he had imposed upon the young tribune to make him truly appreciate the pearl of price that lay to his hand in the person of the British maiden. He had hoped that, denied the privileges of his rank and station, he might learn to love the girl and perhaps in time make her his wife. Such a union between the best of Rome and the best of the wild, free nation of the far-off isle of Britain would be ideal from any but the conventional Roman viewpoint.

Paulus, mourning for that wife of his at rest in her sepulchre long before he entered upon the arduous work of his stormy life, appreciated what happiness might come to Attilius and Gwenna if Attilius could be made to see in what direction his real, true happiness lay. Paulus finally concluded that what the tribune needed was a little misfortune; his way had been too easy, difficulties had avoided him, he knew not how to school himself to disappointment. Sometimes one rises higher from a downfall. He little knew what was being prepared for the Roman.

One afternoon the door of his apartment was thrown suddenly open and into the room stalked the tribune. The Hebrew's eyes lighted as he recognised him. He went forward to the length of his chain with outstretched hand.

"Greeting," he cried in Greek as usual; "thou art welcome, indeed."

But Attilius was in no mood for courtesy.

"I came to thee," he began abruptly, "for the release of my word, for the discharge of my promise."

"And what promise?" asked Paulus, who very well knew but wished his visitor to state it.

"To hold inviolate British Gwenna. I can no longer keep it."

"And art thou a Roman?"

"Yes, as thou knowest, but thou hast imposed upon me more than flesh and blood could bear."

"I have heard," said the old man slowly, "that thou hast forgot Gwenna and all good women. Since thy betrothal to the daughter of Claudius, I am told that thou hast given thyself up to the practices and indulgences of the imperial court."

"And thou hast been truly told," admitted Attilius boldly, "save in one instance."

"And what is that?"

"I could still look my mother in her face were she alive."

"Yes, but for how long canst thou say that?"

"For no time at all, Paulus, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I have the release for which I ask."

"And art thou a man?" asked Paulus contemptuously, "that thou wilt damn thy soul unless——"

It was Attilius' turn to complete the sentence.

"Unless what?" he said to Paulus.

"Unless I consent to the damnation of that of the maiden?"

"Why, she is mine," cried Attilius. "By every law of the gods and man she is mine. Whatever happens

she cannot be held responsible. Knowest thou not the relation between master and slave?"

"That I know well," said Paulus, "for I myself have experienced it."

"I thought thou wert freeborn and a Roman citizen."

"And so I am, but I am a slave of my Lord and Master," he bowed, "Jesus Christ."

"The slave of the Crucified?"

"Even so."

"Thou speakest witlessly."

"Nay, I speak forth words of truth and soberness. I am a man, a man with human passions, one that hath loved and lost. Thinkest thou that I cannot understand thy feelings? Thou lovest this maiden and in that thou doest well, for she is meet for thine affection. Make her thy wife——"

"My wife!" laughed Attilius scornfully; "thou knowest not what thou dost propose, old man. The law forbiddeth."

"I have been in bondage to the law myself, but now I know that glorious liberty wherewith I am made free," answered Paulus.

"What liberty?"

"In Christ."

"How thou flingest thy cursed God into my face!"

"Blaspheme not, Roman," said Paulus sternly.

"Why, thine own race have told me that He was cursed because He hung upon a tree."

"In their blindness they have said so, as I did once myself in like case," answered the Hebrew, "but above all men, He is blessed and the Cause of blessings."

"I did not come here," said Attilius desperately, "to speak about thy God, but about this woman. Thou knowest something of my course. I have plunged into every dissipation, I have striven to feel the madness of those who stake fortunes upon the cast of the die, I have drunk and drunk and drunk until I was stupid and senseless. I have stood on the brink of the pit of every wickedness and looked into the gulf. Unless thou wilt revoke my word, I will plunge to the very bottom. I can no other."

"My son," said Paulus, "there be philosophers who say that we should do evil that good may come. I am not such a one. British Gwenna is a slave, I know her position in thine eyes."

"I love her, old man. I love her as I love liberty, the light of the sun," cried Attilius; "as I love youth and strength and joy."

"And yet thou wouldst drag her down into the abyss."

"Would my love do that?"

"Aye, unless it have the blessing of God."

"That Crucified again!"

"Nay, any righteous god that man may worship."

"Why Jupiter, himself, loved everywhere."

"And that is why," said Paulus quickly, "that my Christus who loved everything, but not in the way in which thou speakest, shall some day erect His cross above the temple of thy Jupiter on yonder Capitol."

"It may be," answered Attilius; "and for my part I care not. I want the maiden. Wilt thou give me back my word?"

"No."

"And why should I keep it?"

"Why, indeed?" asked Paulus sternly. "Time was when a Roman and a Roman's word were things that could not be broken. But we have fallen upon evil days. There is little virtue extant. Methinks, in Christ alone and in His cross are salvation to be found."

"And do ye Christians always keep your words?"

"There are some of us who but poorly follow the teachings of the Master, I grant thee," admitted Paulus, "but He, at least, kept His word, and we who come after can but try."

"On thy head and upon the maiden's head be it. You have some strange influence over her, she is bewitched by this criminal God of thine. I will keep my word, at least now, just to show thee that I can match the followers of thy Christ in fidelity, but what I shall become is on thine own head."

"What meanest thou?"

"I have stopped heretofore on the brink, now I shall go down into Avernus, and the fault is thine and the maiden's, as I said."

"Roman," said Paulus fearlessly, stepping closer to him and straightening up, "I had thought better of thee. When men are ill they expose their character. I have seen thee many times in the cabin of the ship. I heard how thou hadst borne thyself in many wars. I saw how thou didst carry thyself in the scenes of peril through which we passed together. Thine eyes were clear, thy soul clean. I had thought perhaps the

God I serve had marked thee out for some great service for Him, but now I see that I was mistaken. I see that thou art but a common coward after all."

"By Hercules!" exclaimed Attilius, infuriated beyond measure, "no man hath ever thus accused me and lived to tell the tale."

"My time," said Paulus calmly, "is in God's hands."

He did not shrink or falter, although the tribune crowded closer to him with threatening mien and gesture. If Caius Attilius had been armed he might have struck the Hebrew, he was so furiously angry.

"I know not why I should not take thee in my hands and strangle thee as thou standest there," he hissed out.

"So far as I am concerned, thou canst work thy pleasure upon me. I am in God's hands, and if He appointeth me to die by thine in defence of this woman, His will be done. Dost thou hesitate?" said the apostle, stepping back a little and throwing out his hands. "See I am old and unarmed, fettered, too! I think not that this soldier"—he glanced toward the pretorian, who stared at the two with deep interest, although he could make nothing of the Greek in which they talked—"would interfere. Strike. Why dost thou delay?"

"By the gods, I know not," muttered Attilius, "save that I am in thy debt, and——"

"I release thee from any further obligation."

"Thou meanest my word about the maiden?"

"Nay, to that living I hold thee and dead I shall hold thee."

"Coward, slave, Jew!" cried Attilius, almost beside himself.

"But," said Paulus calmly, "is it not true? Hold thee I shall and whether I live or die, if that be so, to what end wilt thou threaten or smite me?"

"What meanest thou?"

"Thou layest thine evil life and vicious course and that which thou intendest to do upon me, an old man, who appealeth to thy manhood, and upon her, an innocent girl, whose soul thou wouldst damn though thou sayest that thou lovest her."

"And is there damnation in my love?" cried the desperate and angry Attilius.

"Yes," said the apostle, "unless thou takest the maiden with the blessing of God for thy wife."

"I spare thee," said the Roman, "but we are quits. Thine insults have absolved me. I am released from further obligation to thee."

"But not from thy word."

"We shall see," said Attilius meaningly. "Meanwhile, farewell. Thou hast blighted my happiness, thou hast crossed my purpose, I would fain not see thee again."

"My son," said Paulus, closing his eyes, "I sometimes dream dreams and see visions. Thou goest hence with thy heart hot and full of anger and fell purpose, but thou canst not do it. Thy fate and mine are linked together. I shall see thee again whatever thy desire. Meanwhile, remember thy word—— I shall pray for thee. Farewell."

Without a word Attilius turned and plunged through the door as abruptly as he had come.

"Soldier," said Paulus in Latin to the curious and astonished pretorian, who had watched all, not understanding, "I would fain worship my God in private for a moment. Suffer me thus far."

He turned, and followed by the soldier with the chain dragging between them, he stepped to one side of the apartment where a little recess was curtained off. He parted the curtains, passed within, and drew them behind him. The soldier standing on guard outside, linked to him still by the long chain, could hear the old man fall on his knees. Words in a tongue which was neither Greek nor Latin, but which was, as the soldier did not know, the Aramaic speech that Paulus had learned at his mother's knees, broke from the lips of the old man kneeling there behind the curtain at the other end of the chain. He prayed for the tribune, for the maiden, for all the members of the little Roman church, for all the churches in all the world, for all mankind, and for himself as chief of sinners.

Caius Attilius hastened home through the streets like a man mad, bereft of reason. He passed into the atrium and summoned Gwenna, bidding the others leave him alone, and made the same appeal to the woman that he had made to Paulus.

"I am bound and fettered, hand and foot," he said, "delivered to the enemy. I go the way of destruction. Not Nero himself shall be more mad or more loathsome than I if thou wilt not give thyself to me."

"Lord," said Gwenna, "wouldst thou have me damn mine own soul for thine?"

And a year before, when she had not heard of Christus, Gwenna might not have hesitated, even at that, for love of this man.

"Lovest thou me?" cried Attilius, catching her by the hand.

"Master," she returned, "I have not held it from thee. Thou knowest that I would die for thee."

"And is death preferable to my embrace?"

"A thousand times, so it be unsanctioned by God and unblessed by man."

"Thou wouldst not have said this before Paulus came."

"In truth I might not, but now mine eyes have been opened."

"And wouldst thou see me damned that thou mightest save thine own soul?"

"God help me, what shall I do?" cried the woman. "Last night, with Paulus standing by, while thou wert with Nero, the waters of baptism were poured upon me. I love thee, I would do anything for thee, anything but this."

"Gwenna!"

"Tempt me no further," pleaded the girl piteously.

Upon a tripod table near by lay a little steel stylus used for writing letters upon wax tablets. It was a trifling thing as a weapon, yet an arm like that of Attilius could easily drive it home through the tender flesh of Gwenna. It stood close at hand. She seized

it and presented it to the tribune with one hand while she tore open the neck of her tunic with the other.

"Strike home, master," she said, "and I will die clean, at least."

Attilius seized the weapon and threw it across the atrium. He caught her by the arm and drew her close to him.

"Gwenna, golden Gwenna," he whispered, "I love thee. Thou hast the spirit of a Roman maiden. Upon what terms may I have thee? Wilt thou be my wife?"

"Thou art mad," exclaimed the woman, struggling away from him, "I am a slave. I know the law. Thou canst not marry me."

"Do thou and Paulus and that God of thine and the Roman law conspire against me to drive me mad?" cried Attilius, stepping closer to her again. "Is there no way in which thou canst be mine?"

"Hereafter."

"No, I want thee now," cried the Roman. "What plighted word shall come between us now, Gwenna, I have——"

What he would have said further she did not know, for at that moment Pheidippides entered the atrium. Caius Attilius turned upon him like a fury.

"Did I not say that I would be private?" he thundered.

"My lord," said the major-domo quickly, "there is one whose commands cannot be disregarded that summoneth thee."

"Who is that?"

"A messenger from Cæsar."

"Admit him," said Attilius in bitter disappointment, after a moment's reflection; indeed no other course was open to him, to deny the messenger of Cæsar was impossible.

"Noble Attilius," said the freedman who brought the Emperor's message, "Cæsar will dine with thee to-night. He will bring with him Tigellinus, prefect of the pretorians, and his friends, Petronius, Senecio, and Pollio. He leaveth to thee the naming of thine other guests."

"Say to the Cæsar," said Attilius, in the face of this declaration which was in effect a command, "that my poor house is at his disposal and that such entertainment as I may compass by the expenditure of all that I have, if necessary, shall be set before him."

"He will be with thee at the sixth hour. Farewell."

When he was alone Attilius turned once more to Gwenna.

"The Emperor here," he said, "and if he should see thee, we are undone. The Fates make sport of me. Nay," he added, as Gwenna came a step nearer him, "approach not nearer unto me now. I cannot command myself. To-morrow——"

CHAPTER XVI

THE DRUNKEN GOD AND THE SLAVE

The hastily improvised but not unworthy feast which Attilius had set before his guests that night was drawing to a close. To say that it had approached the standard established by Lucullus would be far from the truth, and it certainly did not approximate the lavish and extravagant arrangements which had made Otho famous as a dinner giver. But everything had been of the very best and if the repast were somewhat modest from the viewpoint of the satiated appetites and degenerate desires of Nero and his satellites, there was, nevertheless, little to be faulted.

Attilius in his dilemma had summoned the experienced Senecio to his aid and had given him carte blanche as to the entertainment that followed the meal. It was well that he did so, for his own lack of knowledge would have served him badly. As it was, Nero was quite pleased and so expressed himself stammeringly between drunken hiccoughs.

The best wine that the knowledge and taste of Senecio could select and the money of Attilius procure was poured out unstintedly. Everybody had drunk too much, most of them much too much. The conversation had at first been pitched on a high and artificial level of vapid philosophy and pseudo culture, but as the wine went in the wit went out, and the table talk had

presently degenerated into a vulgarity unspeakable, even unimaginable, other than by Cæsar and his friends.

In such conversation the debased Tigellinus naturally took a leading part, while the more refined Petronius became more and more silent. Indeed, he and Attilius and old Regulus, who had returned unexpectedly from Brundisium that afternoon and had been included in the guests, although the humblest of them, were mainly silent. The silence of the rough soldier did not attract much attention. Also Nero was used to the peculiarities of Petronius, of whose caustic wit he stood in not a little awe, and Attilius escaped more particular notice, because, as host, he was busy pressing his entertainment upon his guests.

At one time during the feast a mad desire seized upon the tribune to drink with the rest, but he checked it, not because of any scruples, but for Gwenna's sake. He had an uneasy premonition that she might be in danger before the night was over. He resolved to keep his head clear for any emergency in which she might be involved. As it was, the room in which they dined was alive with her presence. Attilius had not before given such a feast as this, and he could not but contrast in his mind the shamelessness of the scene for which he was in some degree responsible with the stainless purity of the maiden. Why could not Gwenna have been Lollia and Lollia, Gwenna? In that case Lollia could have served him forever without awakening a desire or creating a thrill in his heart. And if Gwenna had only been a Roman of long descent, how gladly would he have married her. Indeed as he reclined on the

couch in his place as host before the table placed upon a dais, looking with veiled contempt at what would popularly be described as the best society that Rome could present, he was almost in a mind to fling pride, family, future preferment, everything, to the winds and make the maiden his in the only way in which he could—by marrying her as he had madly proposed to her that very day.

Why not? What had he to hope for or desire without her? He saw himself descending to the wallowing level of the imperial swine before him. He could not afford to show a gloomy brow at his own feast, but the chaplet of roses he wore on his dark hair comported ill indeed with his desperate, tempestuous heart and with the gaiety he forced himself to assume.

He gazed upon Nero with loathing in his soul. He hated himself for being the subject of such a ruler. If the legionaries on the far-flung frontiers, if the soldiers of Otho, or Julius Vindex, or Suetonius Paullus, could see this horribly incestuous monster who had murdered his mother and wife, and who let the best Roman blood flow like water, they would turn their energies from the protection of these frontiers to the supplanting of this vile beast by some one more worthy to bear the name of Cæsar, and better able to rule the world.

And so the hours sped until, after the last juggler, the last poseur, the last indecent Gaditanian dancer, engaged by Senecio for the revel, had disappeared and the guests had eaten and drunk until they could no more, Nero gave the signal for breaking up of the feast. He got to his feet from his couch with great difficulty,

assisted grotesquely by Tigellinus and Senecio, scarcely less drunk than he. As Attilius looked at his flushed face, gorged with blood, the chaplet awry on his red-bronze head, his unsteady gait, his filmy eyes, his thick voice, he thought of the divinity that was claimed for this beast and laughed mockingly in his soul that there should be any god anywhere.

"B-by my divinity—" hiccoughed the stuttering Nero, "a—a noble f-fe-feast, not but that—thou hast somewhat to—to learn,—Attilius, b-but for a stranger and a newcomer—and—for the f-first time, thou hast done well and—C-C-Cæsar is p-pleased with thee. To-morrow, or the next day—T-Tigellinus shall show thee—what is lacking in thy entertainment. Ye are all bidden to dine with me and so—farewell. B-bring—me m-my toga—slaves."

The slaves who, during the long hours, had stood in the background in dreary attendance upon their several masters, hastened forward to supply the guests with their outer garments. As they sought to cover the loose effeminate silken synthesis of purple which Nero wore with his white toga a thought struck him——

"I—h-have—heard," stuttered the Emperor, turning around and leaning drunkenly upon the table and staring with wagging head and shaking hand at Attilius, "I h-have heard——" He stopped as if to think it over. "Yes—it was L-Lollia—told me wh-when last I—I h-held—her in these arms——"

Attilius started forward in furious indignation at this foul statement, but Regulus caught him by the arm and Nero, too drunk and too absorbed in the effort

to fix his attention upon what he was saying, did not notice him.

"L-Lollia, a p-pretty—p-piece of damaged—b-baggage," hiccoughed the Emperor, "still—she will—make thee—a n-noble wife—and—I will m-make—thy future and hers my b-business. Where was I?—Back, ye slaves," cried the Emperor, throwing out his hand wildly and catching one of the attendants a blow upon the cheek, "I will be served—by thy—g-girl. It was L-Lollia—yes—L-Lollia that told me thou hadst a r-rare slave—as v-v-vestiplica. Bring her out and let me see how she can cloak a C-Cæsar."

"It is late," said Attilius rashly, his heart growing cold at the thought of what might occur if Nero pursued his design; "the women are long since asleep. If Nero will allow me, I myself——"

"Thou th-thick-headed, s-stiff-fingered—s-soldier," stammered Nero contemptuously, "what—dost thou know about d-draping—a toga? It is ne-never late when Cæsar—commands. I have—h-heard—th-there was a Jew once who commanded—th-the sun to stand st-still and it obeyed him. Is—the Jew greater than I? Answer me that, T-Tigellinus?"

"There is no one greater than thou, divinity," answered the prefect promptly.

"T-true, and I say it is m-morning. What sayest—thou, P-Petronius?"

"It is always morning when the sun arises," answered Petronius gravely.

"W-what dost thou mean?"

"Thou art on thy feet, divinity."

"T-that is well—said; T-Tigellinus, m-make a n-note of that. Some day—p-perhaps—thou shalt rival the arbiter in w-wit."

"As I already surpass him in devotion to you, divinity," said Tigellinus quickly.

He was very drunk himself, but none the less persistent.

"T-that, t-too, is well said," commented Nero with drunken gravity; "but where was I?"

"Attilius, our host," said Pallas, the rich freedman and minister of state, who had made one of the company, "sees now that it is indeed day and will produce the maiden."

He spoke with emphasis, for he rather liked Attilius, and he realised that if Nero were thwarted in his desires the consequences might be worse than if they were granted. Attilius had no choice. He either had to break into open rebellion against Cæsar then and there or he had to summon Gwenna and trust to the issue.

"The will of Cæsar must be obeyed," he said, and he could not keep the bitterness out of his voice—and again fortunately Nero's wit was too clouded with wine to take notice, although both Petronius and Regulus observed it and even to the mind of Senecio the idea came. "Bid British Gwenna to come hither," said Attilius to one of his slaves, "to vest the Emperor."

"And b-bid—her m-make haste," said Nero; "the Emperor liketh not to be k-kept waiting—even for a woman as b-beautiful as rumour hath it this slave is. At-Attilius, thou shouldest have kept thy p-people

awake when t-thine Emperor is here. T-time enough for them to s-sleep—when he is gone."

The toilet of a slave girl in those days was not elaborate, and the messenger had enjoined haste upon the British woman, so that in no short time she entered the room. If there had been any way on earth for her to have refused obedience she would have done so. In the first place she was afraid to submit herself to the inspection of Nero. He might recognise her as the woman who had escaped from his clutches in the street some weeks ago. But another, a better, reason would have restrained her. No woman touched Nero without contamination, and it was not to submit to this horror that Gwenna had resisted the pleadings of Attilius.

She had heard of Roman feasts and knew in what condition the guests left them when they broke up. She had an idea of what she might expect, and as she loved Attilius and fancied that he might be in the same state as his guests, a desire not to see him so degraded would also have operated to keep her away. But there was no help for it. She was commanded by her master at the summons of his, and so she came. She could do no other.

She stood in the doorway backed by the curtain, in her tunic of soft blue with her sandals strapped upon her white feet. Her face was rosy from sleep, her eyes indeed were heavy still, but what she saw opened them immediately and widely. Nero still stood supported by Tigellinus and Senecio and the table. The rest stood or sat or lay, in accordance with their various degrees of helplessness. They were all drunk except Regulus,

whose seasoned head could survive longer and deeper potations than any man in the army, and Petronius and Attilius.

Her first glance was for her master. He was frowning deeply, and yet there was an air of great anxiety about him. He shot an almost beseeching look at Gwenna, which she found herself returning in kind, and yet there was a thrill of pride which pervaded her being as she realised that he at least was sober and master of himself. It gave her reassurance, some comfort. Her mute appeal for protection was instantly answered, for Attilius nodded, imperceptibly to all but to her, as if to say that he would take care of her in any event.

The dancers had gone. British Gwenna was the only woman in the large room. To be a woman in such an assemblage would be almost sufficient to damn the reputation of a woman otherwise as far above suspicion as the first Cæsar would have had his wife, but a slave had no reputation anyway and no one needed to consider that phase of the situation.

"W-well," said Nero, blinking around in his short-sighted way, "where is t-this p-paragon of thine? D-do I have to w-wait forever?"

"She is here," said Attilius harshly, "to do thy bidding." He turned to Gwenna. "Woman," he said, and although his voice rang stern the maiden knew that the sternness was not for her, "the Emperor hath heard of thy skill as my vestiplica. Do thou drape his toga about him at his command."

Although she would rather have dabbled in pitch and played with fire, Gwenna stepped rapidly down the

room, received the toga from the hands of Nero's slaves, mounted the steps to the dais, and without a word carefully threw it about him, drew it over his shoulder, and arranged it in accordance with her skill and taste. Her heart throbbed terrifically the while her bosom rose and fell wildly, but she clenched her teeth and held herself together as she busied herself with the hateful task.

Nero stood quietly and stupidly while she did it. Then with a little bow, having completed her duty, she made to withdraw. Attilius breathed a long sigh of relief that the ordeal was over and that nothing had as yet happened. He counted without his guest, however, for Nero suddenly straightened himself up and peered into the face of the woman.

"S-stop," he said, staring at her and fumbling for his emerald, which Tigellinus finally put into his hand. He raised it to his eye, bent his head, and gazed at her. "Where have I seen t-thee before? Answer me,—g-girl," he bellowed as Gwenna stared fascinated and in terror at him. "D-doth no one know?"

The hand of Caius Attilius fumbled where his sword usually hung when he was in armour. Regulus caught that hand and dragged it down. Tigellinus, black fiend that he was, standing close by Nero, and indeed supporting him, whispered something into the Emperor's ear.

"Aye, s-so it was—we were g-going to t-toss thee—in a blanket, b-but some one struck me—the l-lights went out, and when we were rescued, thou wert g-gone. —Am I not right, T-Tigellinus?"

"The Emperor is always right," said Tigellinus.

"There is more wit and wisdom," interposed Petronius, "in a drunken Emperor than in a sober philosopher."

"Thou—art s-sober, thyself, P-Petronius," said Nero suspiciously.

"And that is what enableth me to make the comparison, divinity," answered the courtier smoothly, so smoothly indeed that the sarcasm of his words passed unnoticed and Nero seized upon his subtle statement as a great compliment.

"Dost thou hear, T-Tigellinus? T-take notice—some day we may be without the p-presence of our dear —friend P-Petronius, and thou wilt have to take his p-place."

"In devotion to Cæsar——"

"Yes, I know all about that," interrupted Nero, "but—but wh-where was I? Oh, this m-maiden—I was going to have a k-kiss from her. I will b-buy her from thee now, Attilius, and—at thine own p-price."

"My lord," said Attilius, gritting his teeth and speaking through them, "the maiden is not for sale."

"F-five hundred thousand ses-sesterces," said Nero, wagging his head drunkenly; "everything is f-for sale that C-Cæsar wants to buy. P-Pallas, g-give him—an order on the imperial treasury—for that amount and t-take the girl to my apartment to-night."

"There is not enough money in thy treasury or in the world to buy that woman from me," said Attilius with reckless boldness, stepping forward defiantly, at last completely out of hand.

But Nero did not heed him. He lurched in the direction of Gwenna, threw his hairy, hideous hands upon her shoulders and drew her to him, his lips protruding, his eyes leering.

"W-we—w-will have a—p-pretty time, together," he blurted out. "Thou shalt displace Acte and be my freedwoman, but let not P-Poppæa see thee or thy shrift will be short indeed, and now a k-kiss and we shall go. Noble entertainment—many thanks—to the worthy t-tribune—the best part is the last."

As he finished his speech he leaned forward. Although she died for it the next moment, the maiden who had been struggling in the grasp of the great ape, broke away with one final, violent effort. She thrust out with her hands as she did so and Nero fell backward, only being saved from a plunge to the floor by the aid of those who hastened to catch him, and Gwenna, turning to flee, found herself by the side of Attilius at the foot of the steps. The tribune put his left arm about her, drew her to him, and confronted the Emperor.

Nero shook off those who held him, squared himself, leaned against the table in order to maintain his balance, lifted his head, and glared down at Attilius. They were close together. The Emperor needed no emerald to see the tribune now.

"T-thou shalt p-pay for this insult," he hissed out. "Am I a m-man m-merely, that I should be m-mocked by every m-military stripling that comes to Rome? I shall determine thy f-fate in the morning—m-meanwhile, bide thou here in thy domus until thou dost hear

from m-me. Thou hast the m-maiden now, but when thou art dead, w-whose shall she be—and the Emperor thine heir? After she hath s-served my purpose she shall be whipped until she is flayed of her p-pretty skin, for twice she hath raised her hand against the Emperor, and he is a g-god. Now, w-we w-will go. C-come, all of you."

He turned, and followed by the company staggered down the steps, crossed the room unsteadily, and lurched out through the doorway and into the atrium, where his litter was called. Attilius, still holding Gwenna, with proud, stern, haughty face, looked with contempt at the wavering figure of his emperor.

"Said I not well," muttered Senecio mockingly as he passed, "when I w-warned thee not to let Cæsar catch sight of thy slave?"

"Open thy veins quickly," whispered Petronius not unkindly from the other side, "and do the same with thy slave, lest worse befall thee in the morning. Nero himself might be too drunk to remember it, but there are those who will remind him. Woman," he added not unkindly, as his eye swept the face and figure of the girl, "by Venus, thou art worth any sacrifice, and for thy love a man might count even life itself a cheap price. Farewell."

"Do thyself no harm, on the contrary," said Regulus, remaining behind the others. "Tigellinus is much in debt to me. I will follow him forthwith and will bring thee word in the morning. I have thy promise?"

"Thou hast it," said Attilius firmly; "I am no

"T-thou shalt p-pay for this insult," he hissed out

vein opener, to die at the tyrant's nod. He may kill me if he will. Farewell."

"Hope on. Farewell," said the old centurion, following the rest into the street.

Only the slaves of the house had remained.

"Get you gone," said Attilius, as they looked from him to one another in fearful terror, for they loved their master.

Gwenna had made no effort to withdraw from the clasp of the tribune's arms. She felt safe there and there alone, although she realised that he could do little in such a case. And now as the last slave disappeared he drew her to him.

"Methinks," he whispered, "the hour striketh for us, dear maiden. I face death, and thou shame——"

"My lord, that shall not be."

"Nay," said Attilius, "with mine own hand will I take thy life rather than give thee over to the Emperor."

"I know not whether it would be right that thou shouldst incur the guilt of murder——"

"Peace," said Attilius, "leave that to me. In the face of death all distinctions are wiped away. I love thee. If we escape wilt thou be my wife?"

"Thy wife, lord?"

"See," said Attilius, releasing her and kneeling before her. He caught her knees in his arms. "See, I sue for thee as I never sued for Lollia. Rome is at thy feet, Barbarian," he smiled.

"Nay, nay," said the girl softly, stooping over him

and lifting him up, "not at my feet, master and lord, but in my heart."

And as they stood face to face his arms sought her again, he crushed her against his breast, his lips met hers, and this time she did not draw them away, but gave him kiss for kiss, clasp for clasp, heart beat for heart beat.

"I would that Paulus were here now," the tribune said at last, "that he might bless the marriage with whatsoever rites his gods may dictate, that I might thus have the heaven of thy love before I meet the poison or the steel."

CHAPTER XVII

THE CRAFT OF THE VETERAN CENTURION

Not long after the arrival of Nero, accompanied of course by Tigellinus, at the Transitory House on the Palatine, Regulus appeared at the doorway, determined to see the pretorian prefect. Although he was met by a curt refusal on the part of the officer on guard to carry such a message to his terrible superior at that hour of the night, or of the morning rather, the determination and persistence of the old soldier at last overbore the resistance of the centurion in command.

"Take thou my message," he insisted in spite of the opposition of the veteran, "to the pretorian prefect. Say that I come on the urgent business of the tribune Caius Attilius. Be particular to announce me as the knight Regulus, who was once comrade to the prefect in Spain when we were both younger, and pray him to see me. It is a matter of life and death."

"It would be a matter of life and death to me," returned the centurion, not yet convinced, "to disturb the prefect now, and my life is of more value to me than thine."

"But this," said Regulus, sinking his voice to an impressive whisper and playing his last card, "concerneth the life of the Emperor."

"Ah," said the centurion, wavering a little, "a plot?"

Regulus nodded.

"Thou seest, therefore," he added, "why I must have instant speech with the noble Sophonius Tigellinus. Take the message, officer. The prefect will be glad to see me and his anger will fall heavily upon thee shouldst thou persist in denying me."

The manner of the old soldier was so emphatic, his character was so high, his worth so well known, that the pretorian made no further objection. As the matter seemed of great importance and concerned the Emperor, he carried the message himself and in a short time returned with the news that the prefect would see his visitor at once. Greatly impressed by the apparent influence of the man who could thus easily get admittance to the most hated and feared official in Rome, who was Nero's evil genius so far as the base mind of the Emperor needed an evil genius of any sort, the pretorian's manner was now filled with immense respect, and instead of sending a soldier to usher him into the chamber whither Tigellinus had repaired, he obsequiously conducted him there himself.

Regulus found the prefect in one of the bedchambers of the palace, in the quarters assigned to him, where he proposed to pass the night, not intending to return to his own home until the next morning. Tigellinus had already thrown aside his outer garments and sat upon his bed clad only in his tunic. He was a strong-headed man, and the walk from the Aventine to the Palatine through the cool night air, together with some copious ablutions in which he had promptly indulged, had quite sobered the prefect, from whom the

effects of his deep potations earlier in the night were already passing. He was almost as hard-headed as old Regulus and could drink deeply and carry much liquor without showing it.

"The worthy knight Regulus," said the centurion, as the two entered the room.

"Thou mayest withdraw," said Tigellinus with a wave of his hand toward the pretorian.

"But, excellency——" began the centurion.

"If Regulus," interrupted Tigellinus, "had any designs upon me he could have carried them out twenty years ago in Lusitania when he was the youngest centurion of the Thundering Legion and I was a boy in the cavalry. Art thou armed, old friend?" asked the prefect.

"I buckled on my sword," said Regulus, lifting his cloak, "lest I should be stopped by thieves in the street, but——" his hands went to the belt as if to unbuckle the weapon.

"Keep thy blade," said Tigellinus; "it hath been too often drawn in the service of Cæsar for any one who loveth him as I do to fear it."

"Thou hast well said," answered Regulus.

"And now," said Tigellinus, looking at the centurion, "as I am in no danger, thou mayest withdraw into the atrium and await my call."

The soldier bowed, saluted, and withdrew.

"I suppose," said Tigellinus, "that thou art come to me about that young fool, Caius Attilius."

"I am."

"It is a bad business."

"It is indeed."

"Doth the hot head care enough for a British slave to brave the wrath of Nero?"

"It seemeth so."

"Why, there are women by the thousands to be bought in Rome as fair as she, as——"

"He loveth her."

"Love!" said Tigellinus, mocking. "What sort of a feeling is that to stand between the Imperator and his desires?"

"I, personally," answered Regulus, "have long since passed any such feelings by; age hath taught me wisdom."

"Experience with Cæsar and his women has given me the same mind as thine," said Tigellinus, smiling darkly.

"But Caius Attilius is young and this maiden is indeed charming enough even to have won the liking of a tough old soldier like myself."

"Is he not plighted to Lollia Claudia?"

"I believe so," admitted Regulus.

"It would be better for his slave's comfort that he submit her to Nero rather than that she fall to the hand of that woman of the Claudii, that——"

Tigellinus used unprintable words and epithets when he spoke of Lollia.

"As between her and Poppæa," said Regulus, "there would be little choice."

"Ah," exclaimed Tigellinus, "Poppæa! It would not be a bad idea to play off another woman against her. Nero's passion groweth cold and Acte attracteth him no

more. There is a rumour that she is inclined to the worship of Judea. An inconvenient thing which may tend I know not whither."

"Quite so," answered Regulus, who was not at all interested in Poppæa or Acte. "Hast thou thought what it would be to have Nero under the influence of a woman like the slave of Attilius?"

"I have thought," answered the prefect, whose quick fertile mind needed but a suggestion, "I have thought. Know, O worthy knight and ancient friend, that whatever man or woman the Emperor looketh favourably upon, even for a moment, I take an immediate account of."

The wine he had taken caused Tigellinus to be frank to a degree which he would never have permitted himself had he been in his complete senses. Regulus answered:

"I suppose so, and I suppose also that thou hast thought what would happen if Nero became infatuated with this slave girl."

"Is there a slave in Rome I cannot control?"

"One."

"And who is she?"

"That woman."

"Thou art mad; the woman hath betwitched thee as well."

"I have not lived sixty years, in service forty, without knowing whereof I speak. This is no ordinary slave. She was a daughter of one of the head chiefs of the Iceni. She is a woman of great force of character, of much ability, gracious in manner and beautiful in

person. She is a slave in name only. She has won the love of Attilius. He respecteth her and she preserveth her purity."

"Well, then, if I cannot coerce her," said Tigellinus, "we can work together."

"Not she and thou," answered Regulus.

"Why not?"

"She is a Christian."

"Another of that cursed brood! Some of these days they shall be made to pay for their superstition."

"Very likely," answered Regulus indifferently; "meanwhile, do you want to introduce such a person to Nero?"

"On the whole," said Tigellinus reflectively, "perhaps it would be better not to do so."

"Good," answered the centurion, "thy wisdom agreeth with my humble opinion in the premises."

"Fortunately, it will be easy to get rid of her. Nero, who hath just been put to bed, hath directed me to send a message from him to Attilius in the morning telling him to open his veins; the girl is to be brought here. I can easily add her name to that of the tribune in the death order."

"And how wilt thou explain the addition to the Emperor?"

"He went to bed too drunk to know what he commanded, and if he question I will simply say it was his order."

"I should not care thus to tamper with Cæsar's orders," said Regulus softly.

"How else then?"

"The maiden must disappear."

"But where, and how?"

"Leave that to me. I am thy friend in this," said Regulus.

"What dost thou mean?"

"Before break of day, Attilius will go to the prætor and have this maiden freed. I know of several places of concealment, provided the search and pursuit of her be not too thorough. Thou canst report to the Emperor that she hath gone, that thou art having her searched for, and that when she is found thou wilt produce her."

"That is well thought on provided she be not found."

"Well, that of course is in thy hands."

"Aye," said Tigellinus, "and if thou canst keep her hid for a week or a month, Cæsar will forget her, some other woman will attract his attention, and——"

"I will see that she be kept out of sight for that time. Poppæa, whom thou canst control doubtless, will have no rival and thou canst choose Nero's loves where thou wilt."

"Thou hast done me a service," said Tigellinus, "and I am grateful. Call upon me for further reward and thou shalt see. Meanwhile it is very late, and I——"

"I have only discharged the first part of my errand," said Regulus quietly.

"What more?"

"The rest concerneth Caius Attilius."

"And there even my power is halted."

"Not so."

"Man, man, thou dost overrate me. There is n
power of gods or man which can save Attilius from th
wrath of Nero."

"None but thine," persisted Regulus stoutly.

"Thou speakest in paradoxes; explain thyself."

"The order must be changed."

"Aye, it can be changed," said Tigellinus grimly.
"Attilius could be thrown into the Mamertine Prison,
or he could be starved, or tortured."

"But he is a Roman citizen of senatorial family."

"When Nero is hot against a man what differ-
ence doth that make?" asked Tigellinus contemptu-
ously.

"But public opinion?"

"Who would know if Attilius were spirited away,
and who would have the right to ask? No, Nero is
merciful. He lets the tribune go to his death by his
own hands in the easiest way. To tell the truth, I
was for severer methods, but the clemency of the Em-
peror dictated the message."

"He must write another message and give another
sentence."

"Regulus," laughed Tigellinus, "methinks there are
few in the Empire who stand as high as I and who
are as close to Cæsar, but I would not dare suggest it.
I would find mine own name upon another tablet,
and——"

"Attilius is a man of great wealth," interposed
Regulus irrelevantly.

"And dost thou suppose that Cæsar hath forgot that? All that he hath will come to Nero, and I will admit to thee that Cæsar is hard pressed for money in spite of all that I can do to—ah—persuade the citizens to give him freely of their treasure."

"Exactly," said Regulus. "Much of Attilius' fortune is in bills of exchange scattered throughout the Empire, invested in the hands of faithful bankers in Syria, Egypt, Little Asia, and some of it even in the Far West."

"Well?"

"Well, it will be easy to destroy the records."

"In that case the bankers who hold the securities will get all."

"Quite so."

"And Nero will be disappointed," said the prefect thoughtfully.

"He will."

"But the tribune hath much property here in Rome and Italy."

"That is true, also."

"Well, we shall get that."

"I am not so sure," answered Regulus, smiling, "for Attilius hath made his will and bequeathed what he owneth in Italy to the people of Rome."

"Impossible!"

"Even so."

"Where is this will?"

"In safe hands, and I think that even Nero will scarce defraud these heirs."

Tigellinus mused a moment. The imperial despot

must stand well with the plebs. It were a far easie
matter to confiscate the property of a senator than t
rob the greedy people.

"Thou art resourceful, old friend; what dost thou
suggest?"

"First, every bill of exchange and account shall be
placed in thy hands. The will leaving his Italian es-
tates to the people shall be destroyed; indeed, this testa-
ment will not be in force so long as the tribune lives,
and he shall live, shall he not, worthy prefect?"

"We shall see what can be done," growled the min-
ister. "Proceed further."

"Well, then, I have this to suggest. Attilius must,
of course, be punished."

"There is no escape from that."

"But the punishment must not take away his life
or deprive him of his members."

"Prison?" asked Tigellinus. "I should think he
had rather die."

"Not prison, but the army."

"Send him back to his command?"

"Certainly not. Degrade him from his rank, force
him to enlist as a common soldier."

"In the Fourteenth Legion?"

"In the Pretorian Guard."

"Ah," said Tigellinus, his facile mind comprehend-
ing all the possibilities of the situation, "there is some-
thing in that."

"Thou canst convince Nero that the disgrace of
being a common pretorian, a legionary soldier, when

he hath been a tribune, a legate, hath even been promised command of an army, will be infinitely worse punishment than death itself. Command him to live instead of to die. Thou canst persuade Nero that there is a refinement of cruelty in that."

"But how make him obey?"

"He hath friends near and dear to him, myself for instance, and others. The legion in which he served loveth him. Threaten to kill those friends and to decimate the legion if he dieth by his own hand."

"That is most ingenious," said Tigellinus, licking his lips with enjoyment, "but full of danger nevertheless."

"Sophonius Tigellinus," said the old man gravely, "dost thou remember that day in Lusitania when thou wert unhorsed by the fierce Iberians and left wounded upon the field, and how the enemy's cavalry advanced to take thee as thou fell and one man broke from the legion and ran to where thou didst lie helpless, stood across thy body, and with pilum and sword defied the host and kept them back until a cohort, inspired by his example, advanced and carried thee, a mere boy, and that same centurion, a young man, back into the hard-pressed ranks to safety?"

"I remember," said Tigellinus.

"Well, by the memory of that deed—and I should blush to plead it for any other cause—wilt thou accomplish this my request?"

"And I am to have the records and bills of exchange?"

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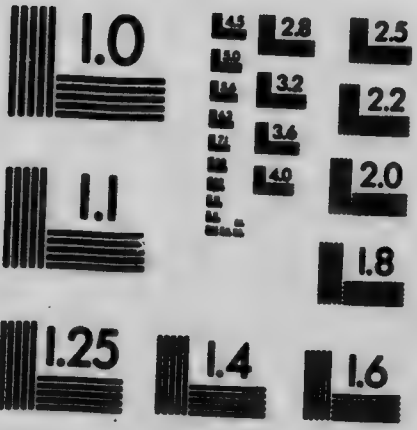

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"Thou art. I pledge thee mine honour to place them in thy hands in the morning."

"And Nero will take all that he owneth here in Roman Italy?"

"All save the maiden."

"Yes, of course. I will accept these bills of exchange," said the prefect with specious magnanimity, "in the service of the Emperor."

"That goeth without thy saying it," said Regulus, who on occasion could match craft with politicians.

"I will do it," said Tigellinus, at last. "I think it may tickle the fancy and please the jaded palate of Cæsar to see this cockerel parading in the ranks. My hand upon it."

Regulus was a plain, blunt soldier, and not overly squeamish, but he lived according to his lights and he had no fancy to take the blood-stained hand of Tigellinus. He realised the force of the two arguments by which he had secured the release of Gwenna and the life of Attilius; lest some one should undermine the prefect's influence with Cæsar in one case, and a greedy desire for the bills of exchange in the other. He did not care to take his hand, but now there was no choice, and the knight was not one to do things by halves. The two therefore shook hands heartily.

"Hark ye, worthy knight," said Tigellinus, "having in this way discharged my debt to thee for that day in Lusitania, plead it no more."

"I shall forget it utterly in the morning," said Regulus, "and I shall be glad to exchange the will of

Attilius and the drafts upon his bankers for the order assigning him to the Pretorian Guard."

"Thou shalt have it," said Tigellinus, "if I can prevail upon the Emperor."

"A good night's rest to thee, noble prefect, and farewell," said Regulus, saluting and turning away.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DEGRADATION OF THE TRIBUNE

Day was just beginning to break when Regulus foun
himself in the street again, retracing his steps to th
domus of Attilius on the Aventine. The place was quie
when he arrived. The night porter stood guard sleep
ily at the doorway. When the old soldier entered the
atrium it was empty save for Attilius and Gwenna.
Hand in hand they sat on a couch at the further end,
and although death stared them in the face, a look
of such happiness radiated from them as brought a
warm glow to the heart of the old soldier.

"Regulus!" exclaimed Attilius, rising and drawing
Gwenna with him. "According to our promise, we
have waited for thee."

"Ye have done well."

"Where hast thou been and what hast thou done?"

"I have just come from Cæsar's palace on the
Palatine."

"And what hast thou learned?"

"The order for thy death hath been delivered.
Cæsar biddeth thee open thy veins in the morning."

"I expected no less; and what of Gwenna?"

"She is to be brought to the palace by those who
deliver to thee the Emperor's command."

"The same lancet that openeth my lord's veins,
openeth mine," interposed the maiden decisively.

"How doth that comport with thy new religion, maiden?" asked old Regulus curiously.

"I know not. I can get no speech with Paulus now, but my heart telleth me that it is better to die than submit to the Emperor."

"Thou speakest like a Roman!" cried Attilius.

"Nay, lord, like a woman."

"But as few women do, nowadays," commented Regulus drily.

"Thou hast done what thou couldst, worthy friend," said Attilius. "The message of Cæsar will be here soon, I take it. Wilt thou leave us alone for a space? I will call thee to bid thee farewell when it comes."

"Not so fast, Caius Attilius," said Regulus; "the messenger may bring a different order."

"That may be worse than death."

"Nay, the Emperor will give thee life, or I am greatly mistaken."

"On what terms?"

"That thou dost enter the Pretorian Guard, as——"

"As tribune, as legate?"

"As soldier."

"And dost thou think," cried Attilius hotly, "that I shall survive such degradation, accept life on such terms?"

"And is it degradation to enter again the service of the state?" asked the old veteran quickly.

"But to be broken in rank, to obey when I have commanded, to be a common——"

"Stay," interrupted Regulus with proud sternness. "I myself began as a common soldier, in the legion.

The proudest citizen should be glad to bear arms e
in the ranks for Rome."

"But he thinketh to mock me——"

"Caius Attilius," whispered Regulus sudden
"dost thou think that Nero will live forever?"

"By the gods!" exclaimed the tribune. "I did i
deed hear mutterings from Otho's veterans in Lus
tania."

"What of the legions of Gaul?"

"I could see that the men of Julius Vindex were a
uncertain as their brothers of Spain."

"And in Britain?"

"The same spirit of dissatisfaction prevails."

"Bide the time, then."

"Thou meanest?"

"How soon shall the measure of iniquity be filled by
this adulterous, incestuous matricide and a new Im-
perator set thee free?"

"No, no," said Attilius, "it cannot be, to put me
to open shame, to point at me the finger of scorn, to
laugh with his chosen friends over my action, to make
sport of me. I had rather die now."

"And this maiden?"

"She, too, shall die."

"But how if she live to become the plaything of
Nero?"

"Perish the thought," cried Gwenna.

"Nay, but thou shalt be free. Go thou to the
prætor with her, Attilius," the old centurion said to the
tribune, "at break of day and manumit her, and leave
the rest to me. Ye shall both live."

"What meanest thou?"

"I have seen Tigellinus."

"Ah!"

"And by our ancient friendship and such arguments as I could command, it hath been arranged that when she hath been made free and disappeareth no search worthy of the name shall be made for her. In a week Nero will have forgot her and the maid shall live."

"While I must die," said Attilius bitterly.

"Not so, if thou hast but wit enough to take thy chance and wait until"—Regulus lowered his voice and peered about the atrium, for what he was to say would bring instant death upon him if it were overheard and reported,—"until another Cæsar ruleth in Rome."

"I cannot do it," cried Attilius, whose proud soul revolted from the indignity. "Urge me no further."

"I have one last argument," said Regulus gravely.

"And what is that?"

"One that I fain would not use. Nero and Tigellinus are determined that thou shalt live. They think that to cause thee to live will punish thee more than death itself."

"They are right," said Attilius.

"Therefore, lest thou shouldst disobey the imperial command and open thy veins at the point of the sword in spite of Cæsar's wish, they have condemned to accompany thee, shouldst thou die, many friends: Pheidippides——"

"He is old and will not care."

"And I am old too and I will not mind," said Regulus simply.

"Thou!"

"Even so. And the soldiers of thy legion are ac
tomed to look death in the face and they will
mind."

"What meanest thou?"

"Thy cohort will be decimated. Cæsar hath s
thou shalt not lack ample following to attend thee
the Elysian Fields for which thou art destined if th
dost disobey him."

"Monster!" cried Attilius. "To punish the inn
cent for the guilty."

"And what else dost thou expect of Nero and Tige
linus?"

"My lord," said Gwenna, "I have listened and
have not interrupted, but now I must speak. As tho
lovest this old man——"

"Speak not of me, lady," said Regulus.

"As thou lovest thy friend, thy soldiers, as thou
lovest me, obey the will of the Emperor. The worthy
Regulus hath d. .ised this plan; is it not so?"

"Even so."

"Thou hast done me sorry service."

"Thou shalt live to bless me for it."

"He speaketh truly," said Gwenna. "Indeed, my
lord, it bringeth us closer to each other. Even a freed-
woman may wed a soldier, a pretorian of the guard.
I entreat thee"—she sank to her knees before Attilius
and stretched out her hand—"live and live for me."

"My honour?"

"It is not involved," said Regulus.

"My dignity?"

"Thou canst afford to lay it by."

"My love," said Gwenna, stretching out her hands and smiling through her tears.

"Have it your own way," said the tribune at last; "on your heads be it, but put me not on guard over Cæsar."

To secure the consent of Attilius had been the hardest part of the task of Regulus, but once that had been given the other requirements were easy. Although it was not an hour at which such business was usually transacted, Caius Attilius and Regulus took Gwenna to one of the city prætors, the nearest one, whom they routed out of bed for the purpose, and in accordance with the ancient rites and ceremonies provided in such case, the maiden was formally and absolutely made free forever.

"Now where shall I place thee that thou mayest be safely concealed?" asked Regulus doubtfully.

He had as yet no house of his own, having lived in the domus of Caius Attilius when not in the apartment he had rented temporarily.

"The good Paulus will take me in and no one will think of looking for me there," said the maiden promptly.

"But there," Caius Attilius pointed out, "thou wilt be seen by the soldier on guard."

"He will commit me to some other friend then," urged Gwenna.

"Thou must disguise thyself," said Regulus, "by putting stain on thy body and darkening thy golden hair. Thou canst then pass for a maiden from Galatia,

a slave in attendance upon the good old man un
can dispose of thee safely elsewhere."

"Wilt thou take her there at once?" asked Att
"Explain all to the worthy Paulus. She is a Chri
and he will receive her to save her from Nero,
perhaps for my sake. British Gwenna," continued
young tribune, turning to her, "I know not whe
where we shall meet again. I know not what fort
may hold for me or thee, but I am sure of one th
and that is that I love thee. Whether I be placed h
or low, I shall make thee my true and honourable w
when I can, shouldst thou be like-minded still."

"I shall never be other-minded in this world," s
the maiden, looking at him, her heart in her ey
"May Christus have thee in His keeping."

"And if there be a God," said Attilius, "may H
watch over thee. Farewell."

It did not take Regulus very much time to esco
the maiden to the insula and leave her with Paulus. Sh
drew her cloak over her head as she passed unnotice
through the outer room whither Paulus and his guard
had been summoned by the old soldier. The pretorian
would not recognise her when he saw her again. She
would be a changed woman, not to be distinguished from
the many others who came and went as guests of the
Hebrew. Paulus received her willingly, although at
the peril of his life. He did not hesitate to do anything
to save this woman, or indeed any woman, from associa-
tion with Cæsar, and he bade Regulus carry a mes-
sage of good cheer to the tribune, for whom he said he

foresaw ultimate happiness, and that with him and Gwenna all would be well in the end.

It was full morning when Regulus got back to Attilius, whom he found walking moodily up and down the atrium. The records of his investments and bills of exchange were soon prepared and given to Regulus at his request.

"What is to be done with my people?" asked the tribune.

"Those who are free can go their ways, the rest fall to Nero."

"I will free Lais if thou wilt provide for her."

"Gladly."

"It is a hard fate to be meted out to some of the others after so many years of service. Cannot thou——"

"Nay," said Regulus, "I have done all that I can. And I do not know even now whether I have succeeded in my purpose."

"Way for the prefect of the Pretorian Guard," cried the porter, suddenly opening the door.

Into the room strode the lordly, magnificently armed Tigellinus, followed by several centurions and a number of soldiers.

"Greeting, Tribune," said the prefect tersely to Caius Attilius.

"Greeting, Prefect," answered Attilius, drawing himself up and for the last time confronting the prefect on terms of equality. "To what doth my poor house owe the honour of this visit?" he asked with elaborate courtesy.

"A command of the Imperator," answered
linus briefly, "which I have brought in person."

"I am overwhelmed at thy condescension," sai
tilius. "And what doth the Imperator desire of

"Read," said the prefect, presenting the order.

Attilius slowly broke the seal. Regulus stepped
to the prefect and whispered:

"Is all well?"

"All is well."

"Good; I have the deeds and bills of exchange
thee in a safe place."

"Thou art prudent."

"Thou hast taught me that necessity by examp
answered Regulus grimly.

Meanwhile Attilius had read the Emperor's messa

"Stripped of all," he exclaimed, lifting his ha
and letting the tablet fall to the ground.

"But there is more," said old Regulus, stooping a
picking it up. "See, thy life is spared."

"But on conditions," added Tigellinus.

"Aye, that I should enlist in thy pretorians, Pr
fect."

"It is even so," said Tigellinus. "Well," he adde
turning to Attilius, "what sayest thou?"

"I am ready," was the bitter answer.

"Administer the oath," said Tigellinus to one of th
centurions.

The next moment the few words were spoken which
utterly changed the condition of the haughty young
patrician, the former tribune and prospective legate,
the future commander of armies, by enrolling him as

a private in the Pretorian Guard, the personal guard of the Cæsars.

"Take him to the camp," said Tigellinus sternly, and yet with evident relish, his mean soul exulting at this unparalleled degradation of the young tribune; "provide him with uniforms and instruct him as to his duties. Thou, Attilius, see that thou dost conduct thyself as a soldier, and remember that anything but implicit, absolute, unquestioned obedience is punishable with death."

"I have been a soldier long enough, excellency, to know the duties of the position and how they must be fulfilled," returned Caius Attilius with a haughty respect which galled the prefect, although he found nothing particular to fault in it.

"And forget not to invoke the gods for the Emperor by whose clemency thou art alive this day," he added sneeringly.

"I shall never forget the clemency of the Emperor," responded Attilius meaningly, turning away, falling into the ranks of the pretorians, and marching with the others from the room at a signal from the prefect.

"The bills of exchange, the will," said Tigellinus quickly to Regulus, so soon as he was alone with his former comrade.

From the breast of his tunic, Regulus drew forth the precious papers and placed them in the hands of his greedy friend.

"Thou hadst them there after all!" laughed Tigellinus.

"I did not serve with thee, even in my youth
swered Regulus quickly, "without learning somet
"Which was——" asked the prefect.
"To trust nobody but myself," answered the s
bluntly, much to the delight of the prefect, who
thoroughly appreciate the significance of such a re

OM

youth," an-
something."

d the soldier
, who could
ch a remark.

Book IV

THE CHAINED HANDS

CHAPTER XIX

LOLLIA CLAUDIA SPEAKETH HER MIND

PAULUS was intently poring over a roll of manuscript. An important letter had been received by the little church in Rome from Peter. After it had been read publicly at the service on the preceding Lord's Day, it had been brought to Paulus by Linus, one of the chief presbyters of the church. The Christians had free access to Paulus, even though he was a prisoner and could not go out to meet with them, nor could they assemble with him save in very small groups because of the limited accommodation of his apartment. He was deeply interested in the epistle, especially as it contained a kindly personal reference to him, which was the more precious to him because there had been in times past rather sharp contentions and grave differences about important matters between the two apostles.

The day was warm, and Paulus sat by the side of an open window. The pretorian of the guard to whom he was chained lounged lazily against the wall near another window. His tour of duty lasted a day, and he was now waiting expectantly for his much desired release. Paulus did not feel well. Some weighty problems connected with the administration of the Church pressed upon him. His face was pale, his brow furrowed, and although he never had a warning of those

seizures to which he was liable, he was indefinab
prehensive nevertheless of something untoward
laid the roll of manuscript down on his knees an
ered his eyes with his hand. He had read it s
times already, and he wanted to consider it praye
and undisturbed.

The pretorian, attracted by the light clink o
chain as the prisoner lifted his arm, glanced at Pa
observed his lips moving, and thought that the old
was praying to his gods, as was often his custom.
particular soldier was a stupid man, upon whon
that happened during his tour of duty made littl
no impression. He was bored rather than anyt
else with the long day of dull guarding in which n
ing of any importance ever seemed to occur, an
was accordingly glad when he heard the steady tram
a number of men mounting the stairs outside. T
presently came to a halt on the platform beyond
door.

Paulus was not able to enjoy the luxury of a do
keeper, and thus no one without had the least hesi
tion in entering unceremoniously. The huge wooden d
revolved and an under officer appeared in the openi
The decurion, bidding the rest of the maniple, or squ
of ten men, remain outside, after directing one of th
to come with him, without a word of greeting stro
abruptly into the room, followed by the designat
soldier. At his belt hung a bunch of keys. The proce
of relieving guard was a common one to Paulus; f
over a year and a half he had witnessed it daily a
it had ceased to interest him. A certain regular numb

of soldiers was detailed for his particular guard and the personnel of the guard was not often changed. There was no novelty about the process or the men.

Nevertheless, the apostle usually greeted the newcomers with a gentle word and a pleasant smile which sometimes won for him a grudging respect and on occasion a certain shamefaced regard, but in this instance he was so deeply plunged in thought over Peter's epistle that he did not lift his head or even drop his hand and raise his eyes.

The pretorian about to be relieved saluted, stood at attention, and extended his arm. The pretorian who was to relieve him stepped forward and extended his arm also. From the bunch of keys at his belt the decurion selected a small one. With it he unlocked the fetter on the arm of the pretorian, who heaved a long sigh of relief as he was thus freed, and watched with interest while the fetter was clasped about the left arm of the newcomer and locked as before.

The newcomer was such in every sense of the word. The legionary who was relieved was a veteran and knew most of the men of the cohort whence the guard of Paulus had been selected, but he had never seen this man before; yet he was apparently a soldier of experience from his bearing. He wore his brilliant armour embossed with silver easily, as if he were accustomed even to things more splendid, and his carriage and manner were begot of long service evidently. His face was in marked contrast to those of the other soldiers of the cohort, or of the corps even. It was youthful, handsome, striking, and imperious. As the piercing

glance of the newcomer fell upon the man about
be relieved, the latter stifled a yawn, dropped to
side hands which he had already extended in relaxati
came involuntarily to attention, and made a motion
if to salute, as if in the presence of a superior.
only checked himself just in time from rendering t
unconscious tribute when he realised that he had to
merely with a fellow-soldier. The decurion, anotl
veteran, saw the salute begun and stopped, and smi
grimly.

"Fall in with the maniple outside," he said to t
man he had just relieved. "Hath anything untowa
chanced during the term of thy guard? Hast th
aught to report?"

"Nothing."

"The prefect hath issued an order that we are
search for a fair-haired, blue-eyed Gaulish or Briti
woman who hath escaped from the domus of one Cai
Attilius on the Aventine and hath disappeared in t
city. Hast thou seen her?"

"There are no women here except the old Jewe
who keeps house for the prisoner and a handmaid r
cently come."

"That handmaid, what of her?"

"She is as brown-faced and as black-haired as ar
Egyptian," returned the soldier carelessly.

"That is well. We seek not such." The decuric
turned to the newcomer. "Thou knowest thine order
The prisoner is not to be let out of thy sight, he
not permitted to leave this apartment, otherwise he
to do as he pleaseth and his confinement and bondag

are to be made as little irksome as possible. His friends have liberty to visit him and they must be treated courteously."

The new guard nodded.

"Thou art to report to me anything unusual or extraordinary which thou mayest observe which appeareth to menace the Emperor and thou art to keep a watch for that fair-haired maiden. Thou wilt be relieved at this hour to-morrow. The prisoner is to provide thee with food, drink, and whatever else thou needest, and on no account must the chain be slipped, although as I have the key that is scarcely possible. Keep good watch. Farewell."

The newcomer saluted, the decurion returned the salute, turned on his heel, and followed the relieved sentry out on to the platform, swinging the door on its pivot behind him. He spoke a few words to the command and the men tramped down the stairs as they had come.

The newcomer stood as if rooted to the spot. Chance had given him the very opportunity he would have craved. His personal appearance, his bearing, his military knowledge, his known courage, would have fitted him for one of the pretorians in immediate attendance upon the Emperor, but Tigellinus deemed it best that the new recruit should not be brought into close touch with Cæsar just yet. For one thing, he was not quite sure of Caius Attilius. For another thing, Tigellinus was too deeply involved financially in the transaction to desire to make it possible for Nero to question his former friend. And lastly, this being chained to the Hebrew was looked upon by most of the soldiers as the

most unpleasant and degrading of the duties of
Pretorian Guard. The prefect had no wish to m
things easy for his new recruit; indeed, there had
tered into his crafty mind the possibility that he co
force him, or goad him, into open rebellion, in wh
case it would be a simple matter to sentence him
death, and no witness to the shady financial transacti
by which Regulus had secured even this much for h
friend and former commander would be left. Tige
linus felt that he could deal easily with the unsupporte
word of the veteran centurion. He did not intend tha
the newcomer should fall into a bed of roses, by an
means.

The young man standing there staring at Paulus wa
in two minds. He knew that what was considered
disagreeable and degrading duty had been devolved
upon him and he was resentful accordingly. At the
same time Paulus exercised a strange fascination over
him, their lives had been linked together by a chain of
events even more binding than was the steel that ran
from hand to hand.

In some degree his punishment was due to Paulus,
although he was too fair a man to lay that completely
to his charge; yet the fact that he had promised Paulus
to protect Gwenna and the fact that Paulus' prohibi-
tion had prevented his passionate desire from running
its course and had thereby whetted his love for the
maiden, had made him more ready to brave even Nero
in her behalf. Again, he might not have bought the
British woman if it had not been for that sign of the
fish which Lucas had given him as they parted on the

island of Malta. But he was too just a man at heart not to admit that he would probably have purchased Gwenna when he saw her on the block of Phryx, and that he probably would have loved her, and even if he had possessed her he would probably have fought with Nero for her, whether Paulus had ever come to Rome or not. So his resentment was not very keen, not nearly so lively indeed as his interest.

That interest was in Paulus himself, who did not fail to impress all who came in contact with him most profoundly, be they high or low in station, Roman, Greek, Hebrew, or what not. There was a strange, mysterious power about the man which affected every one greatly. But the interest of the tribune was greater because through Paulus he hoped to find Gwenna. The conversation between the decurion and his predecessor convinced him that Gwenna had not as yet been captured and Paulus had bestowed her in some place of safety. He did not suspect that the black-haired serving woman to whom the soldier had referred was she.

He wished now that he could see again the worthy centurion, his former subordinate, for since Caius Attilius had been closely questioned and had honestly affirmed that he had no knowledge of the whereabouts of the maiden, it would now be safe to trust him with the secret of her hiding place. The discipline of the pretorians was rigid, but they were allowed a free day in Rome on occasion, and he did not doubt that with the connivance and help of Regulus he could manage to spend some time in comparative safety with golden Gwenna again. He could make a guess that Paulus had

committed her to the care of some of the other Ch
tians, and he was burning with anxiety and desire
question the Hebrew about her, to learn where she
and where he could see her.

There was something in the attitude of the man,
the deep preoccupation and melancholy which were su
gested by his posture, however, that kept Attilius
the moment from disturbing him. He stood in silen
hoping and expecting that Paulus would present
change his position and give him an opportunity
speak, and that silence was a tribute of respect fro
the Roman to the personality of the Hebrew.

When he could bear it no longer, he gathered up th
chain in his hand and stepped toward the silent figure i
the chair. The movement of course attracted the at
tention of the Hebrew. He dropped his hand, his lip
closed, his murmurings ceased, he raised his head and
turned it in the direction of his keeper, beginning his
customary gentle and courteous salutation to the new-
comer.

"Greeting, soldier," he said, and then beneath the
plumed and glittering helmet he recognised the face of
the man. "Caius Attilius!" he exclaimed, "the
tribune!"

He rose to his feet and stared in surprise.

"The same, worthy Paulus."

"And what dost thou here? Is it play on thy part?
Hast thou entered upon this duty——"

"I am a soldier of the guard, as thou seest."

"I remember," said Paulus, passing his hand over
his brow. "I do not feel very well this morning. I

have been told of thy brave defence of the woman, of the trouble in which thou hast been involved by crossing the will of the Emperor, and of the punishment which hath been meted out to thee. But I did not dream that thou shouldst be allotted the duty of guarding me. Didst thou apply for that position?"

"No."

"How then?"

"The pretorians are a rough sort; they do not fancy the long confinement at the end of this chain. The newcomer gets the unpleasant detail."

"And is it unpleasant to thee?"

"Since I am degraded to the ranks, it mattereth little to what further pass I am reduced, or to what duty I am assigned."

"My son," said Paulus gravely, "thou and thy comrades who are bound to me have opportunities unfortunately denied to the others, for which perhaps some day thou and they may thank God."

"What opportunities?"

"To hear from one who hath seen Him, and believed therefore, about the Christus."

"That God of thine," laughed Attilius, half in scorn, half in amazement.

"As the world seeth and believeth in that God of mine, as thou sayest, its fate shall be determined."

"The proposition doth little interest me," answered the Roman; "my fate is already determined. I have lost fortune, liberty, the woman I love. I am a soldier, a legionary; and as thou art my prisoner so this chain

also makes me thine. But enough of that. The maide
—Gwenna, what of her?"

"I have seen her."

"What said she? Was she well?"

"Well, and she hath told me many things."

"Where is she now? What hast thou done with her
How can I see her? When can I have speech with
her?"

"Patience, good youth," answered Paulus, smiling;
"she is well. Thou canst both see her and have speech
with her presently."

"Speed the hour when I shall be released and can
search for her."

"You would not jeopard her life, her honour, by any
rash action?"

"I am not likely to, good Paulus, since to pre-
serve them I have forfeited everything but my own
life."

"The maiden told me of thine action. It was bravely
done, Roman; thou art a man indeed. God shall
requite thee here or hereafter. That thou hast perilled
everything for a slave——"

"A slave no longer; I took her before the prætor
and she is now free as she was born."

"And is a woman ever free who loveth?" asked
Paulus shrewdly.

"May the gods bless thee for those words," cried
Attilius. "Indeed, all that makes me support the
disgrace of my position is that it was for her and that
I have been of service to her."

"And wouldst thou marry this maiden?"

"Would I? Let me throw aside this armour and be a free man once more——"

"But I have heard that thou art still in bonds."

"Thou meanest——"

"To the lady Lollia Claudia."

"The disfavour of the Emperor will snap those bonds," answered Caius Attilius grimly. "I sent her a message of the strait to which I was reduced and offered to release her. She said that I might expect her at the camp this day. I looked for her, not knowing that I was to be allotted this service."

"I do indeed hear footsteps upon the stairs," said Paulus, whose defective vision was compensated for by an unusually acute sense of hearing. "Who cometh, I wonder?"

"Some of thy Christian friends belike," answered Attilius.

"Nay, these are the hours in which they work as slaves, or humble freedmen, or modest citizens, earning their bread in the sweat of their brows. It is some stranger."

"We shall soon see."

As he spoke the door opened again and half a score of slaves in a rich uniform entered without saying so much as by your leave. They separated and disclosed in their midst the little figure of Lollia Claudia.

At the sight of her Attilius started violently.

"So," she cried, in a voice of anger and contempt, "I find thee chained like a beast to this dog of a Jew."

"Chained am I, it were useless to deny it, but he

whom thou dost term a dog of a Jew is a Roman citizen."

"How came the covetousness of the Jew to give way to the temptations of citizenship, since he must have parted with many sesterces for the privilege?"

"I was freeborn," said Paulus gently, "and my father before me."

"And doth the wretch presume to speak to me? Smite him on the mouth," cried Lollia furiously to one of her attendants.

The man addressed raised the whip that he used to clear the way through the crowded streets for the litter of his mistress and stepped forward, but Attilius was before him.

"This is a prisoner who hath appealed to Cæsar. He is under my charge. Lay but the weight of thy finger upon him, slave, and thou diest."

He whipped out the short-bladed Roman sword that he wore as he spoke. He did not raise his voice above its conversational tone, but there was that in his quiet bearing which convinced that particular slave and all the rest. The man fell back in discomfiture and confusion.

"If it be God's will," said Paulus, "that for my sins I be smitten at a woman's command, His will be done."

The bearing of the Hebrew was as meek as his words, but his eyes flashed, his colour came and went, his body trembled under the strong constraint he put upon himself.

"It is not my will," said Attilius proudly, "and that settleth it."

"I might have expected it," sneered the woman; "any man who would throw away life, riches, honour for a wretched slave might even be expected to protect a vile Jew from merited chastisement."

"Thou hast heard?"

"I have heard everything. Thou wert betrothed to me—to me," she struck her breast as she spoke, "and yet for the sake of a common woman from the block, whom I would have given to the basest of my people, thou hast lost the favour of thine Emperor and art brought so low."

Attilius bowed before her. He said nothing, there was nothing to say. No defence that he could enter into would have been of the least use, the woman before him would not have comprehended. She was incapable of fine actions herself and it was impossible for her to understand them in another.

"Thou canst speak fluently in defence of thy leman before Nero, but thou standest dumb before me," she continued.

"I know what is due to a woman," said Attilius, goaded into speech at last, "but I warn thee not to try my patience too far. Thou canst heap thy contempt upon me, perhaps I merit it, but when thou dost asperse the character of that British maiden thy remarks cannot pass unchallenged."

"And who art thou now," cried Lollia insolently, "to question what I say or what I do?"

"I am of a family as old and as honourable as thine own," cried Attilius, forgetful for the moment of his present station; "I am——"

"Thou art a pretorian of the guard, a common soldier! Come no nearer," cried the woman; "touch me not at thy peril."

In his anger Attilius had advanced threateningly close to Lollia. She was brave as her race. She did not give back an inch. She looked at him sneeringly, mockingly, and then lifted her little hand and struck him fair upon the cheek. It was a light blow, but heavy indeed in the bearing. Attilius stood appalled. No chastising hand had ever been laid upon him since his childhood days. He stared into the glittering eyes and flaming face of the Roman woman, his hand clenching and unclenching. Paulus instantly gathered the chain in his hand and with difficulty resisted the impulse to draw it tight so as to hold back the man. He was fearful what the tribune might do, but when he saw that he had not lost his self-control he dropped the gathered links of the chain and watched him anxiously.

"Thou hast struck a soldier of Cæsar," said Attilius, with that same deadly calm with which he had menaced the slave. "The dishonour is to him whose uniform I wear, not to myself. Should it be reported it would go hard with thee."

"And dost thou think they would weigh the word of a pretorian of the guard against the denial of a daughter of the Claudii?" laughed the angry woman.

"I shall give them no opportunity," answered Caius Attilius, "for I remember that thou wert my promised wife and I would not put the shame and danger upon thee."

"Thou fool, one moment in Nero's arms, one whisper

through the lips I might press upon the Emperor's cheek, and thou mightest talk thyself dumb."

"Standeth the matter thus?" asked the tribune.

"Thus."

"There are some compensations even in the direst of misfortunes then," he answered meaningly.

"Yes," said the woman, "if thou hadst died rather than submit to this degradation, I should not have been mocked for the quality of my betrothed."

"Had I lived," said Attilius, "I should have been mocked for the quality of mine."

"Thou dost insult me," cried Lollia.

"I would not so fail in my duty toward a woman," answered the tribune; "if thou art insulted, the insult lieth in Nero's arms and that kiss upon his cheek of which thou hast spoken."

"And thou wouldst be honoured by what the Emperor left."

"That I am not so honoured," said the tribune gravely, "is the compensation that I find."

"Enough," said Lollia, endeavouring to carry off her discomfiture by greater arrogance. "They laugh at me in the streets, they ask me when I am going to wed my legionary. Thou hast made an enemy of me. When I get the ear of the Emperor thou shalt be made to feel what it is to have incurred my wrath. I have not done with thee yet."

"The longer thou stayest and the more I hear, the more I congratulate myself upon my escape."

"Dog," cried the woman in fury, "let me go that I may get to work upon my vengeance."

"I pray of thee, lady, of thy kindness stay a moment," interposed the old Hebrew.

"Dost thou address me again, Jew?" cried Lollia in surprise.

"For the second time I presume."

"What wouldst thou?"

"A word with thee. Nay," continued Paulus earnestly, "deny me not. It is for thine own interest."

There was something in his voice and bearing which affected Lollia strangely.

"Well, then," she said, coming to a sudden decision. She threw her hand out toward Attilius, "Stand aside."

"If thou wilt," said Paulus courteously to the young Roman.

"At thy request," returned Attilius, walking to the limit of his tether and turning his back.

Paulus and Lollia conversed for a few moments.

"It is false," cried the woman suddenly; "I will have thee beaten."

But Paulus only shook his head.

"Remember, I pray thee. As for beating me, it would profit thee little, and indeed I am under Cæsar's protection and will some day have a hearing."

"That for thy protection," she said in fury.

She seized from the nearest slave the whip and with it struck the apostle viciously. The lash curled across his shoulders and left a red line on his cheek. His face was suddenly transformed. White with anger, breaking all bounds, he straightened himself and extended his hand.

"God shall smite thee, thou whited-wall, thou Jeze-

bel," he cried loudly. "How darest thou raise thy soiled hand against the Lord's anointed? Go and be silent!"

"I go," said Lollia, turning away and striving desperately to conceal her sudden terror at the strange wrath of this old man who towered above her like an ancient prophet. "I have left my mark on the Jew's face and on thine, soldier, and I trust I may never see his countenance again or thine," she continued, striving to regain her lost ascendancy.

"I forgot myself. I was wrong to be angry. The God whom I serve bless thee, woman," said Paulus most contritely and gently, "and grow within thee a clean heart and a right spirit. Thou knowest not what thou hast done. Forgive my bitter words, and go in peace."

But without a word the shaken Lollia turned away and rushed angrily down the room and out of the door, followed by her slaves. There had been something so terrible in the sudden fierce blaze of the Hebrew's anger that she could scarcely sustain it. Attilius lifted his hand, drew off his helmet, and brushed the cold sweat from his brow as he looked wonderingly at his companion.

"I forgot myself. I have sinned. How often doth this evil spirit in me get the mastery of me," began Paulus in deep contrition. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

"It was nobly done," answered Attilius.

"Dost thou fear that woman?" asked the apostle, shaking his head in disclaim of his keeper's praise.

"I fear her not. She may tell the Emperor what she will. I am alive by his command and at Gwenna's entreaty to me and because I would not cause innocent blood to follow mine. If he condemn me to die, I shall——"

"She will not speak to Cæsar."

"You know her not, worthy Paulus," said Caius Attilius; "she fancieth herself scorned, and she is not far wrong in her imagining. You know it hath been said, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

"Nevertheless, she will not speak to Cæsar; I am old, in humble circumstances, a prisoner, but Aliturus——"

"The Jewish dancer?"

"The same. Well, he hath often consulted with me. He hath told me of this Lollia, among other things that happen at court."

"And didst thou threaten her?"

"Nay," said Paulus, "I simply told her what I knew and begged that she would leave thee to thy fate. There was punishment enough in that."

"Aye, and degradation. Let her speak and let Nero kill me. I suppose I should thank thee for that release if he shall do so, for to what but death have I to look forward now?"

"To Gwenna," said Paulus, smiling at him.

"Ah, tell me of her!" cried Attilius.

But Paulus was not looking at him. A sudden change came over his white face, his jaw fell, his eyes dilated, his fingers expanded for a moment, a low, awful cry broke from his lips, then his jaws snapped like a trap and ground together, his hands clenched, his eyes rolled

upwards. A fleck of white foam fell from his lips upon his grey beard. His face became engorged with blood. He collapsed suddenly, crashing down upon the floor, where he lay convulsed, thrusting and wallowing; sense, sensibility, intellect gone, rolling like a beast at the feet of the tribune.

CHAPTER XX

THE STROKE AND THE SPURNING

Attilius stared at Paulus in horror, the sound of that awful crying almost freezing the blood in his veins. It chanced that he had never before seen a man so stricken and yet he recognised the nature of the attack at once. He was as brave a man as ever faced an enemy. He was as sceptical about the existence of the gods as any Roman of his time, yet in his heart, as in the hearts of all, lingered a belief in omens, malign spells cast by evil spirits, indicated by appalling visitations—a final residuum of a once blind faith in mysterious divinities. The comitial disease, for so the Romans characterised the falling sickness, or epilepsy, because it stopped even the business of the state whenever it was manifested, was looked upon as a direct manifestation of the wrath of the gods, as indicative that the sufferer from it was under the ban of their displeasure, and that some evil fate pursued him and marked him out in the frightful way as an object of superhuman animosity.

There was little pity or tenderness in a Roman heart at best, especially for a Hebrew. Attilius had got over the well-nigh universal prejudice against the Jew as such, so far at least as Paulus was concerned, because he admired him and respected him; he even loved him in a way, in spite of his nationality, because of his

qualities of mind and soul, but when these were in abeyance the ancient antagonism rose to the surface.

His feelings toward the convulsed man at his feet were of horror and loathing, even of contempt. He made not the slightest effort to succour him or to control his writhing—although his movements were frightful; but he stepped nearer to him, however, as if fascinated, and bent over him, staring into that face usually so benign, so composed, even majestic. And that face which was normally the index of the man's soul was now twisted awry, hideous, inexpressible.

"And I am chained to this!" said Attilius under his breath, all his contempt finding vent in his words.

As he spoke he thrust the apostle with his foot, spurning him as evidence of his loathing and his shame. There was a swish of drapery in the air, and a woman thrust herself between the tribune and the prostrate figure. So violent were her movements and so unprepared for her onslaught was Attilius that he was almost thrown off his balance as he staggered back.

Drawing from her head a cloth, a piece of silk with which her hair had been covered, she spread it over the face of Paulus, lifted his head and shoulders in her arms, and strove to steady him. She was the better able to do this last as the fierceness of the attack had about spent itself when she came in.

Attilius had not seen her face, and she had as yet spoken no word, but as he stood removed a little way, there was something strangely familiar about her figure.

Her heavy hair was black, her arms, neck, and cheek, what he could see of them, were brown. Had it not been for that he would have sworn——

When the tortured, writhing body of Paulus had finally relaxed so that he lay quiet in her arms, the woman turned her face up toward the tribune.

"I saw thee spurn him with thy foot, Roman coward," she said bitterly.

Her face was a revelation which her voice, never to be forgot, confirmed.

"Gwenna!" exclaimed the amazed tribune, utterly forgetful of Paulus.

"Attilius!" she cried in equal surprise, as she recognised him; surprise succeeded by horror at what she had seen him do.

"The gods be thanked I have found thee."

"If the world had told me that thou wouldst put that indignity upon a stricken man and one to whom thou art so indebted, I would not have believed it. Nothing but the sight of mine own eyes hath convinced me. I hate thee."

"The Jew is cursed of the gods," said the tribune.

"He hath therefore the more need to be befriended of man."

"I care not to argue with thee about that," said Attilius. Indeed, he did not think that he had done anything amiss and he believed that the maiden's displeasure would be no more than a passing whim. "Thou art here, thou art unharmed, I have found thee. Leave the old Jew to himself, he is quiet now, his fit hath passed, and come to my arms."

"Hand me yonder cushion," said the girl, pointing toward a seat and utterly ignoring his plea.

"Must I fetch and carry for a——"

"Wilt thou obey me?" she cried, as if she had been Cæsar himself, and, marvelling at her fire, Attilius did her bidding.

She placed the cushion carefully under the head of the prostrate apostle, composed his limbs, arranged his disordered dress, and with the cloth she had taken from her head wiped his lips. When she had done all that she rose to her feet.

"Now," said the eager tribune, stepping toward her with open arms.

But she in turn stepped quickly away from him and stopped just beyond the limit of the chain which ran from the soldier's arm to that of the stupefied, prostrate figure, and there she faced him, a look of scorn and contempt upon her face.

"Last night," she said, "I loved thee."

"And to-day?" burst out Attilius.

"I cannot tell. I loved a Roman, strong, brave, true——"

"And hath the night taken away my strength, or diminished my bravery, or made me a liar?"

"The man to whom I gave my heart was gentle, honourable——"

"Thou hast a wondrous imagination," said Attilius bitterly, "to ascribe these qualities to a Roman."

"And yet thou hadst been all these things to me."

"And have I changed?"

"So it seemeth."

"And why?"

"Perhaps with the uniform of the legionary thou hast put on the manners thereof. Many soldiers have been charged with guarding Paulus, but they have all learned, sooner or later, at least to respect the man. I marvelled, when I saw thy sandalled foot thrust at the body of the helpless, unconscious sufferer, which one could put upon him such an indignity, and my heart broke when I learned who had done it."

"And dost thou care so much for this old, almost dead, stricken Hebrew, that because I touched him with my foot thou canst throw over a love like mine?"

Attilius would not say he was sorry. Indeed, he was not, save so far as it affected Gwenna.

"I am afraid to trust myself to love like thine," answered Gwenna coldly.

"And yet in the past I did not use thee so ill."

"Thou wert kind to me according to thy lights, more than kind perhaps, and I am grateful——"

"But thou carest more for him yonder than for me?"

"Think a moment," said Gwenna. "Had it not been for thine obligation to him, which he used in my behalf rather than in his own, what had been my fortune?"

"I had loved thee!"

"Yes, for a brief space, but now belike I should be a discarded slave, the plaything of my newest master. He saved me, but not alone for that do I love him as my father. He hath told me the truth and he hath given me back my faith in God."

"Dost thou believe in the gods?"

"Nay, but in One and His Son Christus; Paulus hath taught me; he hath been prophet, priest, and father to me."

"And yet the punishment of the stroke?"

"It may be; I cannot tell. I am unlearned in these things. In his youth he persecuted those in whom he now believeth. He was stricken down by a vision in the way, and ever since that time when deeply troubled, or agitated, or concerned, the falling sickness seizeth him. So Lucas told me. Paulus thinks it may be a punishment for his sins in the past. He hopes it may be considered in some degree as expiation for what he was and what he did. I have not known him for the year or more which hath passed since thou didst take me from the block of Phryx, without understanding as much as a simple maiden can of his character. This that seizeth him he calleth his thorn in the flesh. He will be weak and sick hereafter for some days, and when he realiseth what hath befallen him, shame and humiliation, such as thou thyself mightest feel, will fill his heart. Yet he will bear it, counting suffering as honour for Christus' sake. And that he is so punished for what he did so long since is evidence to him that God deemeth him worthy of this affliction. For he saith, 'Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth.' Yes, I love the good old man."

"And I am as nothing?"

"I will not say that," answered Gwenna more softly, the quickness of her resentment and anger beginning to die down; "thou wert much to me—yesterday."

"And to-day?"

"Less."

"And to-morrow?"

"I cannot tell."

"And to win thee what must I do? Love this Jew?"

"He would spurn, as I, love that was assumed for a purpose. But if thou couldst honour what he honoureth, if thou couldst learn what he teacheth, and believe in Him he doth proclaim——"

"I believe in nothing," said the tribune, "but in thy beauty. Come hither."

He spoke with the imperiousness of bygone days, forgetful of the change in conditions.

"Thou speakest as if it were yesterday," said the woman.

"Yesterday?"

"Yesterday I was slave, to-day free."

The tribune made a step toward her. She did not give way an inch. She was as courageous as Lollia, it seemed.

"Caius Attilius," she said firmly, as she saw him gather the chain into his hand to drag the prostrate figure of the senseless Hebrew toward him to give him further freedom of movement, "if thou dost disturb the sleep of that good man by dragging upon that chain thou wilt lose me forever."

"And was it for this," said the young man, standing very erect and speaking very quietly, although his heart was throbbing furiously, "was it for this that I braved the wrath of Cæsar and saved thee from his drunken caresses and kept thee from his polluting arms? Was

it for this that I gave up fortune and home? Was it for this that I accepted the degradation of this service? Was it for this that I am chained to this wretched old man while Rome out yonder mocks and laughs? Yes, as thou sayest, thou wert a slave and with a slave's art and with a slave's cajoleries thou didst cling to my neck, thou didst press thy lips upon mine, thou didst whisper love words in my ear, thou wert ready to die at the point of my sword with me, rather than be handed over to Nero. But now that thou art free, thou hast naught for me but scorn. Thou dost seize upon the foolish pretext of an impulsive movement of a disgusted, broken man as an excuse. Ye are all alike. Lollia Claudia was here before thee. The same heart beats under every woman's vesture. She came to mock me and insult me. She struck me on the cheek, but the blow of her hand, although it burned and burneth still, was nothing to the blow to my heart and soul that thou hast given me. Thou didst love me as a slave to escape from thy servitude, but now that thou art free, I am nought to thee but a thing to mock at. By the gods, were it not for those brave men whose lives hang upon mine, I would this instant unsheathe this sword," he stuck it a fierce blow, "and with this right hand run it through my sad heart. But I must live a life deserted, a life shamed, a life abandoned, a life mocked, a life denied of love, and thou mayest look on—free!"

"Lord," said the woman, stepping toward him, the angry colour faded out of her cheek, her bosom heaving; she had made several efforts to interrupt him as he had spoken, but he would not permit it.

"Back," said Attilius, thrusting her away; "as thou saidst a moment since, I am at the limit of my tether, both of this chain and my temper. Why shouldst thou care for me now that I am broken in fame and fortune? There are other men, there is even Nero. Shall I whisper to him where thou art hidden?"

"Forgive me," said Gwenna, quailing before the fierce passion of his face and bearing.

"Forgiveness? I am a Roman; that is for thyself and the Jew yonder."

"Nay."

"Trouble me no longer. I am on duty and would fain not speak with one who changeth her heart as easily as she changeth her complexion. If there are women within or if Lucas can be found, he is a physician, bid him be summoned. The man needeth care. It is not my place to give it to him. I am here to guard him and do thou go."

"Where wouldst thou that I should go, lord?"

"Anywhere, so it be out of my sight. Perhaps to the lady Lollia. Thou mayest find her in a congenial mood —freedwoman!"

Without another word poor Gwenna turned on her heel and left the chamber. Attilius stepped back to the prostrate body of Paulus, which happened to be lying near the wall, walked to the window, threw open the casement, leaned his head on his hand, and stared out over the city which he had entered so short a time before, filled with so much joy of life; the city where he had hoped, dreamed, loved, and lost.

Rebekah came presently, and after a little space, the

boy Isaac having been despatched for Lucas, he came also. They did what they could for Paulus, Attilius never heeding. When they had all withdrawn save Lucas, who watched by the couch upon which they had laid his master and friend, the Greek physician and the tribune had some converse together. Lucas told the Roman how dreadful was the affliction under which Paulus suffered, how it came upon him without warning at the most inopportune times. On occasion he might be preaching the Gospel to incredulous and unfriendly audiences, only to be stricken down amid mocking laughter and contempt, and how in spite of that which would have sent a less heroic man into retirement he toiled on and on.

"It seemeth to me," said the Greek, "that God hath chosen the weak things of this world to confound the mighty, for never hath Paulus faltered. To-morrow, weak, nervous, sick, thou wilt yet see him, so far as his tether permits, working about the mighty business of his Father. Thou art a young man and a strong. Thou wouldst be amazed if thou couldst know what this man hath undergone. There is scarcely a city of the East in which he hath preached his Gospel whose most loathsome prison is not familiar to him. The stripes that have been laid upon that poor, frail body are beyond number. To look death in the face is a habit with him. Five times to my knowledge did he receive from his own nation forty stripes save one, and three times hath he sunk under the fearful flagellum of thine. Once he was stoned. To that shipwreck which we underwent together, two more must be added, and in one of

them he was a night and a day in the deep, sustained by pieces of wreckage. But in it all he hath preached the Gospel. I tell thee, Roman, when I think of his journeys, some of which I have been humbly permitted to share, of his perils of rivers and robbers, from his own countrymen, from the heathen; the dangers of both the city and the wilderness, his watchings, his hunger and thirst and cold, and beside all these things his anxiety for the churches founded of peoples whom he hath led to Christ—who among you hath done better for his king, and who is more worthy to bear the high honour of Roman citizenship?"

The Greek was eloquent in the story of Paulus, as he outlined it, and his adventures in Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia, to say nothing of Jerusalem. He told of Philippi, of Thessalonica, of Athens, of Corinth, of Ephesus, and the account of all that Paulus had suffered and all that he had undergone moved the tribune profoundly. A sense of shame stole over him at the thought of that half-inadvertent thrust of the foot.

"He hath suffered much," said Attilius, seated opposite Lucas on a chair by the side of the couch.

He rose as he spoke and looked into the face of the apostle. It had become composed, his breathing was natural and easy, the dignity and power of the man's soul had come back to him. It was the Paulus whom he had known, who lay there now; but weak, old, ineffably weary, the burden of years, cares, and experiences heavy upon him. The tribune bent over him,

holding the chain in his hand so that it might not clink and awaken the sleeper.

"So," said Lucas gently, "I have often seen him bend over thee in the cabin of the ship when thou wert nearly dead, nearer death than he is now."

"Will he die in one of these strange seizures, thinkest thou?"

"He hopeth not. He would fain wear a martyr's crown, and indeed I think it will so come to pass, but not until he hath finished his course, until he hath fought his fight, the fight of one who keepeth the faith."

"It seemeth strange to me," said Attilius, "that one could be so brave, that one could endure so much, that one could survive such humiliation, for a mere dream, for an ideal founded upon a vision."

"And if that were so, it would be strange," answered wise old Lucas; "men do not spend themselves nor are they spent so gloriously for dreams and visions. That Paulus hath done and will do all these things is evidence of the truth that is in him. Men have believed before and died for their beliefs, I grant thee," continued the evangelist.

"Aye, and when both belief and believer have been in error," said Attilius.

"But where are such beliefs and believers now?" meaningly asked the physician.

"Gone," admitted the tribune.

"Even so, for that which is not founded upon truth cannot prevail, no matter how magnificently it be proclaimed or how gloriously men give themselves to attest it. It is thirty-eight years since Paulus was stricken

down, and now the whole East is dotted with temples where he hath preached his God and where that God is now worshipped. Thou dost not know, thou dost not realise, thou dost not understand this. Those who follow Christ are poor and humble mainly, only here and there is one rich or noble or powerful. But there are thousands of them. They come from all sorts and conditions of men, and some day at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Christ is Lord!"

"Not my tongue and not my knee," said Attilius; "I mean no disrespect to Paulus or to thee, good Lucas, but I cannot see and I cannot believe."

"Some day, something says to me, O Roman, thou wilt both see and believe."

CHAPTER XXI

MOCKED IN THE GARDEN

Caius Attilius saw no more of Gwenna during the remainder of that day's service. Paulus slept long, and when he awakened Lucas would allow none to question him. Usually men seized as he have no remembrance of their seizure when consciousness returns, but Paulus had been too often the victim of such attacks not to realise presently what had happened to him when he finally awoke to reason and life again.

He was a proud man, this Hebrew, of the proudest and most ancient lineage of his tribe and race, and although in the service of his Master he exhibited that humility which was so characteristic of the Christ he followed, he was only human; and that he should be so afflicted in the presence of friend and enemy was worse than death itself to him. Indeed, Paulus was a man of fierce and haughty temper naturally, not always controlled, as Lollia Claudia could bear witness. His pride comported not ill with his Roman citizenship, yet so extraordinary was his self-repression and the high command he exercised over himself that it was on rare occasions indeed that he broke forth as he had upon the lady Lollia with such startling results.

With returning consciousness, a look of shame, succeeding the first struggle for recollection, covered the apostle's face. There was something so pitiful and

pitiable in his humiliation that Attilius forbore to converse with him or even to look upon him, and when the old man lying helpless and broken upon the couch covered his face with his hands and murmured that he was crucified with Christ, although Attilius did not apprehend, he did not question. Silence was best for Paulus then. And a feeling of shame began to steal over the iron-hearted Roman for that spurning foot of his. Yet that growing repentance did not modify his resentment, his bitter anger against Gwenna, who had been, according to her lover's ideas, so ungrateful.

Something in the tender consideration shown to one another by the inhabitants and visitors in the apartment was communicated to the tribune. Some sort of leaven was working in his mind. A year before he would have hesitated not at all before Jew or Roman, but now, although he had provocation enough for speech, both in what Lucas had told him and in the explanation of the presence of Gwenna and their future relations, he kept silent. Yea, like the Psalmist of whom he had never heard, he refrained even from good words, although it was pain and grief to him. So the afternoon and night wore away at last.

When the day broke Paulus aroused himself and performed his ablutions. Like the high-class Hebrew of his time, he was scrupulously clean about his person, not to say dainty, and although his vesture was old and worn and plain, it was spotless. Not even Attilius himself was more careful. Restored to something of his usual self, Paulus greeted the young tribune pleasantly, but engaged in no conversation, and when the hour of

relief arrived the Roman bade him farewell and went off with the decurion and his soldiers.

The Fates, as he would have phrased it, were certainly against him. He had been brought very low; he fancied that the worst to which he could be exposed had befallen him. He was yet to experience the further malice of Nero. The Emperor had not forgot him. By his personal order he was that night made one of the guards on duty at a fête in the palace gardens, where but a few days before he had been a guest with all the privileges and liberties accorded to the others; while Nero laid aside the purple and simply became the chief blackguard among his emulators, who, at his own command, treated him exactly, on such occasions, as they treated one another.

He was now a soldier, and although to bear arms had been of old counted the highest privilege of Roman citizenship, Attilius was made to feel that he was little better than a menial. A deliberate effort was made to call attention to his disgrace and increase his humiliation and shame, for Nero with Lollia upon his arm—Poppæa being similarly occupied elsewhere with one of her own favourites—both of them drunk and half naked, paraded up and down before the guard, whom they discussed as if he had been a block of wood, or perhaps better, one of the unfortunate slaves stood up for auction.

Taking their cue from their master, the brutal Tigellinus, the effeminate Senecio, the caustic Vestinus, with the whole profligate and abandoned crew, heaped insult and mockery upon him by insinuation, innuendo, and, as

they became more drunk, by open and reviling accusation. The proud soul and fierce temper of the Roman revolted. He stood quietly to outward seeming, but within was on fire with suppressed pasion. Although the gardens were lighted, the means of illumination were not sufficient to make faces clear in the dimness of the shaded park, else had the leering, lurching Nero caught sight of the blazing eyes of the tribune he might well have been afraid.

Attilius resolutely determined upon his course. In fact, so soon as he saw what they would be at, he decided that silence was not only the safest,—truth to tell he cared little about safety!—but the best course, and if he could endure without a word their insults, if he could let them pass him by like the idle wind which he respected not, the very fact of his indifference would give him the mastery in the end and even up the score. But it was not an easy task to which he applied himself. He could not estimate the power of exacerbation exhibited by his former friends nor his own power of resistance. He had fought in many battles, he had struggled on stricken fields, huddled together with his comrades, desperately striking at hordes of barbarians when it seemed that no valour, no resolution, could ever keep them back; yet he had never fought such a battle as he fought that night.

He felt the need of more than mortal help for his more than mortal task. When he could he cast his eyes upward. Although he believed in no god, his heart spoke voicelessly, perhaps from some ancient inheritance of simpler worship. Finally, at the climax of his tor-

ture, when the roisterers ringed about him, made their comments upon him, and at last actually cast pieces of gold at his feet, as at the feet of a player who had amused them, and he let them lie in disdain until the voice of Nero hiccoughed a command that he pick them up, the thought of Paulus and what he had whispered that morning came to him. What had been the apostle's words? "I am crucified with Christ!" Who was that Christus to whom he prayed? The old gods in whom he did not believe had done nothing for Attilius, perhaps that Christus——

He made no prayer, he did not know how to make a prayer, that Roman, but the thought of that Christus and who He might be came into his mind; for surely no crucifixion could be more terrible than that mental punishment the tribune was undergoing. Even the vague thought gave him some comfort. Paulus was a man, what would he have done? Attilius, now that he had entered upon his part as a soldier, determined to play it to the end. He saluted Nero, therefore, and stooped and gathered up the coin.

"I thank thee, Cæsar, for thy generosity," he said, "and thy noble friends for the worthiness with which they sustain the Roman character and the Roman fame."

"And hast thou no word for me, legionary?" cried Lollia, and she had never loved Attilius more than as he stood now an iron statue, towering over even the Emperor, masterful beyond expression, amid these drunken Romans. "Hast thou no word for me?"

"Thou hast thy reward, lady, with him whose arm

encircleth thy waist. Mayest thou prove worthy of thy position and get out of it all that thy beauty and thy character may merit."

"Let him be killed," hissed the woman, upon whom the meaning of the speech was not lost in spite of the dulling of her wit by the wine she had indulged in so freely.

"No," said Cæsar, "it was a p-proper speech. I have none too many s-soldiers as p-patient as he. I cannot spare him yet. Say I not well?"

He looked around the circle.

"Well, as thou dost always speak," said Tigellinus.

"Silence, b-blockhead," said Nero, "I want the opinion of my arbiter, P-Pe-tronius."

"Divinity," answered that senator, who had taken no part in the torment of Attilius save to watch it with keen interest and to long for some one with whom he could wager that the tribune he admired would not lose his self-control, "Divinity," began Petronius, "in thy speech and in thy bearing thou art worthy of the occasion and worthy of the beautiful Lollia as she is worthy of thee."

The Emperor and his companions were too deeply besotted to catch the irony in the arbiter's voice and manner, but Caius Attilius observed it and was glad.

"Tigellinus, take notice," stammered Nero. "Shouldst thou b-be able to t-turn c-compliments like that thou m-mightest aspire to the p-purple—but when I am g-gone," he added with sudden cold menace. "Come, let us away; I am t-tired of this virtuous s-soldier. Bid him begone."

It was late indeed when Attilius got back to the barracks, and when one of his fellow-soldiers questioned him about the night, with a soldier's desire to hear some vile detail of what had happened, he turned on him with such fury that the man, although one of the boldest of the cohort, subsided into silence at once.

Attilius was not popular with his comrades. Although his rank was equal to theirs, even below that of the veterans and under officers, they could not forget that he was a noble and a patrician and had been a tribune; nor could he forget it. Indeed, they presently conspired to make life miserable for him, thinking they could safely do so as he was under the disfavour of their Emperor and their commander, the prefect; but Attilius had not lost his prowess, his strength of mind and body, because he had been reduced to the ranks, and he found means with a ready sword to enforce respect, or at least undisturbed solitude. He was a man, they soon found, who was best left alone.

The next day being free, he went into the city as soon as the morning drill and routine of the camp was over. Of all his whilom friends, there was but one whose door would now be open to him, and that was Regulus; but when he inquired at the lodging the worthy knight had chosen, he was told that Regulus was gone from the city upon a journey and would not be back for several weeks perhaps; but he had left a message for Attilius, saying that he would apprise the tribune of his return immediately he reached the city again.

The absence of Regulus was the last straw. The public places of Rome had no attraction for Attilius

now. He walked aimlessly through the meaner quarters of the town, which in happier days he had never visited. He had nowhere to go but to the camp, nothing to do there unless he participated in the ribald talk, the rough pleasures, and the deep drinking of the soldiers, so he wandered on. The pretorians were favoured visitors in that quarter of the city, but there was something so stern and so grim in his face that not even the bold, shameless women of the town accosted him as he passed.

The long afternoon dragged on without incident, but as night fell something happened. Turning a corner, he saw a group of beggars and outcasts setting upon a single man, scarcely more than a boy. They had backed their prey up against a wall and were striking at him savagely. His forehead was cut and blood streamed down his face. His white tunic was spotted with filth that had been thrown upon him. The mob surrounded him, mocking and jeering.

There was something familiar to the tribune about the boy. Attilius unceremoniously burst through the wretched crowd, flinging them aside until he reached the lad and confronted him. He recognised him at once upon a nearer view. The sufferer was the Hebrew boy who had brought the message from Paulus which had resulted in the finding of Gwenna.

"What hath happened?" he asked sternly.

"Sir, I know not," answered the youth, "save that these set upon me."

"And wherefore," demanded Attilius, facing the crowd whose rage began to subside at the sight of the

stark soldier of the guard whose well-known uniform was easily recognised even in the growing dusk.

"He is a Jew," answered one voice, as if that were sufficient.

"Ye have done enough; begone," said the tribune, and then as the crowd made no movement to give way, he whipped out his sword. "Shall I cut a path for myself and the lad who is now under my protection?" he asked imperiously, making a step forward, whereat they broke and fled like the cowards they were.

"What is thy name?" asked Attilius when the way was clear.

"Isaac, son of Levi and Rebekah, master," answered the boy, wiping away the blood, "and art thou not——" he hesitated, looking from the uniform to the face of the man, "thou wert——"

"I was Caius Attilius, the tribune, to whom thou didst once bring a gracious message——"

"But now?"

"I am a soldier," returned the other briefly. "Whither goest thou?"

The boy hesitated.

"Thou art a friend of Paulus?" he asked as he made a quick movement in the air with his hand.

"I know that sign," answered Attilius, "and I am a friend of that worthy Hebrew."

"I go to a meeting of the Christians, noble sir," answered the boy, reassured that it was safe to make such a revelation.

The idea struck Attilius. Why should not he go with the boy? He was interested in these Christians.

Gwenna was a Christian. Time hung heavy upon his hands. He had no place else to go, nothing to do. Why not?

"I will accompany thee on thy way, lest these should assail thee again," he said, making up his mind promptly.

The boy hesitated again. He was still somewhat doubtful.

"None know the meeting place but those who believe," he said at last.

Attilius nodded.

"I believe not," he said, "but I will not betray thee or thy friends. Lead on."

There was something in the bearing of the man which added emphasis to his words. Isaac, son of Levi and Rebekah, was not without a large share of the shrewdness of his race. He decided in favour of the tribune.

"Thou hast befriended me," said the young Hebrew at last, "and I trust thee. There lieth our way."

CHAPTER XXII

HUSKS OF THE SWINE

In the rapidly darkening night the two walked along the streets side by side. Isaac, the son of Levi and Rebekah, knew his way perfectly, and although he plunged from one alley and by-street into another, and finally struck boldly across the fields, he presently arrived at an ancient sand pit without the walls. The spot was deserted. It was removed from the highway and trees on one side and the ruins of an ancient building on the other concealed it from the possible observation of a belated traveller on the distant road. The moon just rising cast a faint light into the little amphitheatre.

There were perhaps four score persons assembled there, all of them of the meaner sort apparently. They were grouped in a little circle, some sitting, some standing, about an old man who was talking to them. The faint rays of the moon gave light enough and no torches or lanterns were visible.

"And who are these?" asked Attilius.

They had stopped in the shadow of the trees and were yet unseen and unheard.

"This is the end of my journey," whispered the boy, "and these are Christians. We meet here for worship and instruction. He in the midst is the priest."

"And how is he called?"

"Linus."

"And who are those around him?"

"Slaves, freedmen, women, and children."

"And of what race?"

"Of all, Romans, Greeks, Hebrews, Barbarians."

"And are they all followers of that Christus?"

"All; none come here except those who love Him."

"But I am here," answered Attilius.

"Of thy mercy," returned the boy gratefully, "and for my safety. I thank thee. I trust thee. Farewell."

"Farewell," said Attilius, turning away, not especially attracted by what he saw to a closer acquaintance with the assemblage.

But something stopped him. Why not? he asked of himself again. The Romans had abandoned him, the Emperor had degraded him, the world had mocked him, Gwenna had failed him. He did not see what end there was to all this shame. They were all slaves and poor people there, doubtless; Barbarians and Jews and Greeks and—but Paulus was a man. Caius Attilius remembered what Lucas had told him; Paulus believed and Gwenna. There was nothing else before him. In despair, in weariness, in humiliation, he turned back.

"I will go with thee," he said to the lad who had watched him.

But the proposition affrighted the boy.

"Art thou a Christian?"

"Nay."

"Dost thou seek——"

"I seek nothing, but I will go with thee. Come."

He seized the unwilling boy by the arm and stepped forward.

But the lad struggled.

"Thou wouldst affright them," he whispered hurriedly and in terror. "They do not know thee; they will think thou art a spy of the Emperor; they will flee. Thou must not go."

"And do even these reject me!" thought Attilius bitterly, as he faced the boy; but the thought only increased his determination.

"Go thou, then, and tell them that a poor soldier of the guard would fain join them. Thou knowest what I was. Pledge them mine honour that I will not betray them; I mean them wel' If Paulus were here he would vouch for me. Thou kn[illegible]st he is my friend."

"I will go," said the boy, "and do what I can."

"Farewell. I will await thee."

Attilius from the shadows closely observed all that happened. The lad made his way through the group of people and stopped before the man who stood in the midst of them. He spoke and the others listened. The tribune saw the man bend to the lad, and after a little conversation he spoke to the assemblage in turn. What he said was not audible at that distance, but the tribune could catch indistinctly what he recognised as a murmur of surprise not unmixed with alarm. In the dim light he saw two persons rise from the circle and approach the centre. The three conversed together earnestly for a moment while all the rest got to their feet and stared in the direction whence Isaac had come. The circle opened presently and the three who had spoken came

toward him. Attilius stepped out of the shadow into the moonlight, and the leader of the three, a venerable old man with a long white beard, stopped in front of him and made the sign of a cross with his hand.

"Greeting, soldier! Whether thou comest in peace or to betray, the followers of Christ bid thee welcome," he said softly.

"I come in peace, venerable father," returned the tribune; "my word upon it."

"The simple statement of the noble Caius Attilius sufficeth," said the second of the newcomers; "I vouch for him with my life."

"Master," exclaimed the third, a woman, "dost thou not recognise us?"

"Eurotas, my philosopher, and Lais, my foster-mother!" exclaimed the newcomer. "Are ye also among the followers of Christ?"

"Led by British Gwenna, we have so become, praised be God," answered the philosopher.

"Come, then," said Linus, the first speaker, extending his hand simply, and the four turned and walked down into the little amphitheatre. "The soldier cometh in peace, dearly beloved friends and brethren," continued Linus as he passed through the others. "He is vouched for by Eurotas and Lais and young Isaac here."

"Thou art welcome in Christ's name, friend," said some of the elders among the congregation.

"Let us continue our worship," said Linus, standing in the centre as before, while the others disposed themselves, reclining, standing, or sitting, in accordance

with their fancy. As became his position, the tribune remained on his feet on the outer edge of the circle. The moonlight sparkled softly on the silver bosses of his armour, making him an utterly alien figure in that shrouded, grey, silent multitude.

"Dearly beloved," resumed Linus, "a moment since I began to tell you a story told by the Master which I had from the lips of Lucas. Dost thou know the learned Lucas, soldier?" he asked suddenly of the tribune.

"I know him," answered Attilius. "A physician, a friend of Paulus, who is a prisoner."

"He told it to me not only by word of mouth, but he hath written it down as part of that life of the Blessed Jesus who was crucified and rose again from the dead, which he is preparing for the use of us all. I copied it a few days since for this meeting. Mine eyes are dim. If one would hold the lantern, thou Cletus, I will read it to you all."

There were lighted lanterns in the crowd, but covered mostly with cloaks and other garments. Cletus, one of the elders of the little church, though a younger man than the leader, took a lantern that was proffered and stood by the side of Linus, holding it so that the light fell upon the scroll.

Never would Attilius forget that scene. The little circle of worshippers on the grey slopes of the sand pit, the old ruin, a deserted temple of other gods he thought, in the background, the soft mellow light of the rising moon, the long, dark shadows, the faint gleam from the lantern falling upon the parchment

which trembled in the hands of Linus; the face of the reader, the accompaniment of the night wind through the trees on the further side, the deep breathing of the spectators, crowding close, listening for the first time to an immortal story as it fell from the lips of Linus, who read it tenderly and with deep feeling.

"A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.' And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself he said, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father.

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.'

And the father said to his servants, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

The voice of the reader ceased amid the deep silence of the people, a silence no one cared to break, it seemed.

"Is that all?" finally questioned one of the older women.

"There is more to the story," answered Linus. "I will copy it and read it to you another time; but it groweth late, the slaves must return to their masters."

"What meaneth the Master by this story? Tell us, I pray thee, before we part," asked another of the humbler sort among the congregation.

"I am unworthy to interpret the mind of Christ," said Linus humbly, "but the meaning of this is so plain that I shall even try. It maketh no difference how far we wander from our Father's house, what we have done, how deep we have drained the cup of shame, into what sins we may have plunged, what husks of the swine we have eaten, the Father waiteth for us. Christ Jesus, Who lived here among us, Who was poor as we are poor, Who was humble as we are humble, Who suffered more than any of us have suffered, hath told Him about us. When we turn and repent and come back we shall find our Father waiting for us at the end of the road. In one of the many mansions our room is always ready. If we will only turn back our welcome is certain."

"The Lord herein speaks of mercy and lovingkindness and pity and forgiveness?" added Cletus.

"What saith the ancient prophet of my people?" exclaimed Levi, a venerable Hebrew, the husband of Rebekah whose boy Isaac had brought the tribune there, "'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'"

"Washed in the blood of the Lamb that was slain," cried a woman's voice.

After another pause the whole assemblage spontaneously broke into a hymn of praise. They sang softly and in unison. Attilius listened like one in a dream. He had heard the chants of worshippers of strange gods all over the world, but never a hymn like that. It moved him strangely. And the story too. Had it really happened? Was there truth in this worship? Could there be such a God? If he could judge, these people themselves believed it, and yet——

The hymn died away and in the silence Linus spread out his arms and bowed his head. Some of those who were present rose to their feet, most fell upon their knees. With those standing the tribune bowed his head —he who was accustomed to carry it so high—while the old man prayed. Attilius had heard many prayers, but never petition like this for clean hearts, for pure lives, for high courage, for endurance, for love, for the forgiveness of sins, for mercy to enemies and to themselves; for their brethren, for the other Christians in the world, for Rome itself and that world!

A musical Hebrew word, the meaning of which At-

tilius did not know, was breathed from lip to lip as the voice of the priest died away.

In the silence the tribune lifted his head. He saw in the moonlight the hand of the priest was raised high. His fingers cut the air in the sign of the cross—not a fish this time. The tribune watched in wonderment. That brand of shame was evidently their badge of honour. He heard these mysterious words also:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore."

That was evidently the end of the ceremony. The others waited in silence, but Attilius could stand no more. He threw his cloak about him and vanished in the darkness. After a space one who had been near the tribune looked to another.

"The soldier," he exclaimed, "where is he?"

"He stood by my side," answered another. "After the blessing, he wrapped his cloak about him and disappeared."

"Will he betray us?" asked a third nervously.

"I will stake my life upon his honour," answered Eurotas.

"He is a true man," said old Lais confidently.

"Go in peace, brethren, severally and on your separate ways, and may God be with you," said Linus, himself turning away. "That soldier will not betray us," he added in serene confidence.

Attilius desired speech with no man. He plunged across the sand until he found the road, and then shaking out his cloak he walked silently down the way.

That was a strange story that Christus had told, that Lucas had written down, that Linus had copied and read. A young man plunged into the depths of humiliation and shame eating the husks of the swine? The Roman took off his helmet and bared his head to the night breeze. There was something in his own case that brought the story home to him. The money that had been thrown at his feet by the Emperor and his companions still hung in a little pouch at his waist. Husks that the swine had given him! He reached down into his pouch and flung the coins far into the fields.

No man had aught for him, he had lost everything; even Gwenna mocked him. What was that Christus who had told that tale? Could He hear? That was a fond and foolish dream. There was no Father at the end of the only road he had left to travel. Resentment swept over him as he thought of all that had happened. He shook with passion like the trees along the roadside in the night wind. He cursed the old gods, he mocked the new, praying that he might die out there on the lonely road.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LETTER TO PHILIPPI

Caius Attilius was glad when the fetter was locked upon his arm and he found himself once more chained to the Hebrew. His tour of duty as the guard of Paulus came around every third day. He had slept sound and well the night before, the first sleep he had had since his disgrace. When he had awakened he had sought to laugh away the things which had come into his mind as he walked home from the little Christian assemblage; but the scene, the words of the preacher, the music of the hymn, and above all the story that he had heard lingered in his memory. And again he was ashamed of his subsequent passionate outburst upon the road, though no one had seen it or heard it. He finally gave himself up, as he mechanically performed the morning duties, to a consideration of these things that he had heard. He resolved that he would speak to Paulus when he had an opportunity about all that had come under his observation and the thoughts to which his experience had given rise. Also he would find out what was signified by the sign of the fish.

There was something in the story of the prodigal which especially touched the tribune. Although the causes of his own downfall were radically different from those set forth in the parable, although his fate by any construction was not so bad as that of the spend-

thrift in the story, yet the parallel was close enough for him to consider the account with sympathetic appreciation.

It was not so easy for him, however, to speak privately with Paulus that morning, for the old Hebrew was very busy and the changing of his guard interrupted him in the dictation of a long letter or rather the completion of it. The young man Attilius had seen on his first visit to the apartment when he had sought Gwenna was again at the table, and Paulus had been walking up and down so far as his tether would permit, slowly speaking the words which the young man transcribed on the white parchment.

He greeted Attilius kindly, but when the under officer had withdrawn and they were alone he thus addressed him:

"Knowing thine honesty and thine integrity and thy kindly feeling for me, noble Attilius, I have taken advantage of it by appointing this day as one in which I receive the brethren, for I am sure thy consideration for me will make bearable my bonds. Can I depend upon thy discretion?"

"Thou canst," answered the tribune promptly; "I have waited anxiously for this day."

"That thou mightest see Gwenna?" commented the apostle, smiling. "I am old, but I have not forgot the wife of my youth and how the blood burns in the young heart."

"No," answered Attilius proudly; "I am nought to British Gwenna. Since she hath been freed she hath forgot me."

"Oh youth, youth!" smiled Paulus.

"She hath forgot me like all the rest," persisted Attilius, with well-assumed indifference.

At this the apostle laughed outright, not boisterously, but with gentleness that robbed the merriment of any sting.

"We shall see," he said; "meanwhile I am anxious to finish this letter. Epaphroditus, here, hath been very ill in this thy Rome and pineth for his Greek land. Dost thou know Philippi, Caius Attilius?"

"I have been there. It is where Cæsar won the world away from Brutus and Cassius. There the Republic fell."

"Even so," answered Paulus, "and there I first preached the Gospel in Europe. There is a little church there——"

"Not so little now, beloved teacher," protested Epaphroditus respectfully.

"Great with love, at any rate, for they are mindful of their friend in his adversity, and out of their poverty they have made offerings to relieve my need and have sent me words of cheer, and although since my father's death and the receipt of my share of the patrimony I am not compelled to manual labour as I once——"

"Is it possible," interrupted Attilius, "that so learned and venerable a man hath laboured with his hands like a slave?"

"Every Hebrew must know how to support himself with his hands in case of an emergency," answered Paulus; "it is the ancient law, and although I was

born and reared in affluence with no expectation that I should be compelled to work for my daily bread, I was nevertheless taught a trade."

"And that was——"

"Tent-making."

"Aye," said the tribune, "thou art from Tarsus in Cilicia. And canst thou weave goat's hair?"

"Thou shouldst have a specimen of my work for thyself if I were free. Seest thou that old cloak yonder?"

He pointed to an old garment upon the wall.

"I see it."

"I made that myself with mine own hands, and it hath served me many years."

"It is old and worn but it is good still," said the tribune, examining it carefully.

"It will last my time," said the Hebrew, smiling. "Well, although my need was not great, I accepted the offerings of these my children in the faith. I have many who come to me here in Rome and I am glad to be able to help them. But to the letter again. Take up thy pen, my son. We will talk further when I have a convenient season during thy charge, Caius Attilius; meanwhile keep thine ears open or closed to what I have to say, in accordance with thy pleasure. Art ready, Epaphroditus?"

"Ready, master."

"And what said I last?"

"'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'"

"Ah, yes," said the apostle, "that is a good place at which to close and a good word with which to end."

"Wilt thou sign it now?"

"Nay, it cometh over me that I have yet more to say. Write thou as I speak the words.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

"Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am

full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

"Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Paulus had told Attilius that he could listen if he desired and indeed the permission was supererogatory, since the shortness of the chain rendered it impossible for the guard not to hear everything that was said unless the speakers addressed each other in whispers. But Attilius had no wish not to hear; what he had heard the night before and what he constantly saw while on duty moved him to listen. Whenever he was with Paulus the personality of the man influenced him profoundly, and it was with strained attention that he stood silent, never disturbing the apostle as he walked up and down between the tribune and the secretary, his thoughts and vision turned inward apparently, as he slowly and deliberately dictated the great words.

What kind of a religion was it that Paulus so confidently wrote about? Truth, contentment, purity, loveliness, virtue!—these did not agree with what Attilius had heard of the religion of Christ! How could a man who spoke like that be guilty of the dark practices, the Thyestean banquets, where they feasted upon flesh and

blood, the repellent unsociability, the gloomy charms and superstitions, of which popular rumour was already beginning to accuse them?

As the Hebrew dictated slowly Attilius had time to think on these things. One word after another struck him. Paulus, the poor prisoner, was actually proclaiming himself contented with his lot. He was glad to suffer! Attilius was very discontented with his and not at all induced to rejoicing. Whence did the Hebrew draw that power which was denied the Roman? Was it from that Father of the story last night or was it from that Man who let Himself be crucified without striking a blow?

And so the disciple and the soldier listened while the voice of the apostle went on until he closed the dictation with a prayer that the grace of that Lord Jesus Christ might be with all those to whom he wrote in Philippi. And Attilius, looking into the face of the venerable man as he spoke, saw strange lights within it. He was still pale, still haggard, still worn. The imprint of the last stroke that he had sustained a few days before was yet upon him, although he looked much better than when the tribune had seen him last; but this was forgot in the mysterious power which seemed to emanate from his person.

Attilius was a highly educated young Roman and knew Greek as well as he knew Latin. That word "grace" he understood in full. It meant strength; Paulus was invoking strength. He was asking for the strength of the Man who had been so weak that He had let Himself be crucified without resistance. The

mind of Attilius came back to that fact again and again. It was passing strange.

"Master," said Epaphroditus presently, "it is finished."

"Thou hast well done," said the Hebrew; "give me thy place and pen."

He sat down in the chair before the writing table, quite unlike the tripod tables used by the Romans—it was one which some of his Jewish friends among the Christians had made for him—bent low over it, because in spite of the brightness of his eyes his sight was bad, and traced his own name in large heavy letters across the foot of the parchment. Then he rested his head in his hands in wordless prayer. Doubtless, thought Attilius, that his gods might bless the message. And when the ink was dry he handed the roll to the young Greek and bade him start forthwith on his journey.

"Hast thou made every preparation?" he asked anxiously.

"Master, I have," answered Epaphroditus; "I go by land with a company of travellers from Rome to Brundisium, thence across the Adriatic to Amphipolis, and then by the Egnatian Road home."

"And thou hast money for thy journey?"

"I shall work my way."

"Nay," said Paulus, going to a chest in one corner of the room. "Thou seest I fear not," he smiled up at Attilius, as he unlocked and opened it, "to show thee where I keep my moneys."

"I would that I were as I was that I could fill thy

chest with treasure for thy needs, Paulus," said the tribune earnestly.

"I have enough for myself and somewhat to help my friends, but I thank thee," returned the Hebrew.

He took several pieces of gold from a bag and pressed them upon unwilling Epaphroditus, who had meanwhile assumed his cloak and taken in his hand the broad hat which, being a Greek, he wore when travelling.

"Re-enforce my letter by carrying every message of loving greeting to my children that thine heart can dictate or thy lips frame."

The young man dropped on his knees before the apostle. He laid his hands, and from one of them the chain fell over the young man's shoulder, upon the head of the kneeling messenger and invoked upon him the blessing of God and the companionship of the Holy Spirit from that Christus, whom he loved, that the young man might go safe and unharmed upon his journey.

Epaphroditus had scarcely left the apartment when visitors came in. At the head of them was old Linus. He was accompanied by three men, and started with surprise on beholding Caius Attilius.

"Give me leave, beloved Paulus," he said, turning to the soldier. "Did I not see thee last night beyond the walls?"

"I was there. Have no fear. I did not betray thee."

"Nor will he," answered Paulus; and then, looking with some surprise at Attilius, he added, "Thou didst not tell me of thine attendance upon that meeting!"

"Bethink thee, Paulus," returned the tribune; "the

hours so far have been filled with thine own concerns; when the convenient season cometh of which thou spakest——"

"Aye, I remember; of that presently. Meanwhile, beloved Linus, worthy yoke-fellow in the Gospel, what wouldst thou of me?"

"Here are three men, one of them a tax gatherer, the other of the people, the third——"

"A fellow-soldier," said Attilius; "I recognise the marks of his trade."

"Even so," assented Linus. "They have professed Christ. I baptised them in the grey dawn this morning at my house. I have brought them hither to be confirmed in the faith by the laying on of hands, and that they might receive thy blessing and words of counsel."

"Thou hast well done."

"The citizen is named Robulus, the tax gatherer Orontis, and the soldier Quartus."

"These names shall be entered in the Lamb's Book of Life," answered Paulus, "if they remain faithful unto death. Suffer me a moment."

He clapped his hands and from within the apartment Gwenna appeared. Attilius stared at her now as he saw her. Neither her dyed hair nor her darkened skin could much diminish her beauty in the eyes of the tribune. He made an involuntary step in her direction, but although she smiled gently upon him, he stopped, drew himself up, and turned his back. She was not for him. She came at the summons of Paulus to do the Hebrew service. As for himself, he did not care.

"Lucas is doubtless busy with his writing within,"

Paulus said to Gwenna; "of thy courtesy, maiden, I pray thee ask him to come to me and bring with him the roll he hath writ about our Lord, the first portion of it only."

"I am glad to do thy bidding," answered Gwenna, her heart thrilling equally with that of the tribune when she faced him.

Yet she resented the look full of haughty indifference and his turned back, and she was woman enough to emphasise the pronoun and Attilius was man enough to feel the emphasis. Presently Lucas, roll in one hand, pen in the other, presented himself.

"My friend and fellow-servant," said Paulus, "here be Linus with three who have been made children of Christ by baptism this morning. They seek words of advice from me and I have sent for thee and thy book that thou mayest read to them the words of our Master, to the people, to the publican, and to the soldier which these represent. Thou knowest the portion to which I refer?"

"Well. Give thee good-morning, Attilius; I am always glad when thou art in attendance."

"Shall I go or stay?" asked Gwenna.

"Stay," returned Paulus; "the more who hear the words of Christ the better."

"I have the place," continued Lucas.

"Read."

"'And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat let him do likewise. Then came

also publicans to be baptised, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him saying, And what shall we do? and he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.'"

Attilius listened as before. The charge to the soldier interested him the most and yet the order was contentment! Why was the Man always preaching contentment to the discontented, peace to the warrior, calmness to the turbulent, kindness, love to everybody—— What sort of a gospel was that for a Roman!

"And now, friends," said Paulus after the clear voice of Lucas died away, "draw near and fall upon your knees. Closer, if thou wilt, good Caius Attilius," said the apostle, looking toward him, "that I may use my hands despite our chain."

Indeed, the tribune was nothing loath to step forward. In doing so he had to pass close to Gwenna. She caught him by the arm for a moment. She was determined to punish him for his indifference.

"Thou wilt not spurn him with thy foot to-day?" she whispered.

The blood flamed in the face of Attilius. He shook himself free impatiently and stepped to the side of the apostle. Gwenna was not yet altogether a Christian in accordance with the standards of Paulus, it would seem.

And thus the two stood together, the Roman and the Hebrew, at the several ends of the chain. And which

was the greater? Which was the master? Which was the prisoner and which was the guard?

Successively the hands of Paulus were laid in confirmation and blessing upon the heads of the kneeling figures and the chain dragged from one to another, clinking not unmusically in harmony with his prayers as he moved before them.

When the three had withdrawn a little space, the service being ended, and Paulus stepped away with Linus, Attilius divined that he would prefer to be private and withdrew to the extreme length of the chain. As Paulus and Linus spoke in low whispers he could not hear what they said. He found himself face to face with Gwenna. As usual, it was she who broke the silence.

"I am sorry," she said in a low voice, "that I spoke to thee as I did. It was unwomanly and not like the teachings of Christus."

"Thou hast rejected me in my humiliation, cast me off in my degradation," returned the Roman. "I am too poor a thing now for the Princess Gwenna. What she cared for as a slave is nought to her since she is free. But it is all one to me," went on the tribune haughtily; "I have drained the cup of disloyalty to the dregs, the Fates have done their worst for me in life. I await the stroke that ends it. Nay, let there be no more speech between us," he continued as Gwenna started to interrupt him; and to give due emphasis to his words he turned deliberately away and walked toward the window.

He did not see the maiden bury her face in her hands

and turn half blindly toward the curtain and then vanish from the room, and he did not know that his cruel words more than repaid her for everything that in her haste and temper she had ever done or said to him.

"On the first day of the week then," Attilius heard Paulus say, "which happily will be three days from to-day, we will celebrate the Holy Mysteries and break the bread for these new-made children of Christ, and for such others as thou mayest select, remembering that the room is but small and scarce will hold more than a score."

"At what hour, beloved teacher?" asked Linus.

"At break of day," answered the Hebrew. "And so farewell."

Presently the prisoner and the guard were left alone.

"Paulus," began Attilius at last.

"My son——"

"Tell me about that Christus of thine if it be a convenient season."

"Willingly," answered the apostle. "Let us sit here on this couch by the window."

Suiting action to suggestion, the old man and the young tribune walked over to the couch and sat down, Paulus leaning easily back on the cushions, while Attilius sat more straight, as became a soldier. The chain fell to the floor in a little heap between them.

And there the Roman listened for the first time to the story of the Cross. As Paulus told it it seemed new even to him. Many times the apostle had related it to listening people, but he never told it better than now. He had not been there himself, he admitted, but

he knew every detail from the lips of those who had, and when he finished it seemed to Attilius that perhaps there had been more courage and fortitude in resigning Himself to the Cross than if, which would have been the Roman method, this Christus had taken one of Peter's swords and died fighting in the garden.

"What thinkest thou of Christus now?" asked Paulus when he had completed the account.

"He seemeth to me like one of the immortal gods," answered the Roman soberly.

A less able man than Paulus would have caught at that proposition for further discussion. He laid his hand gently upon the other's knee.

"Thou art on the way," he said, "thy feet are on the road."

"Tell me more," asked Attilius, "after this Christus died on the Cross and was buried, what then?"

Paulus resisted the temptation. Whenever he talked to them he was exquisite in his tactful handling of men. It was better that Attilius should think of what he had heard; the more he thought the better he would be prepared for further teaching, so Paulus shook his head.

"Nay," he said, "we have had enough for one day and the noon hour approacheth. We will break bread together, and in the afternoon we will discuss——"

"Discuss what?" asked the tribune.

"Thy future and that of British Gwenna," he answered, smiling, forcing himself to give the conversation another turn.

But Attilius would not be denied.

"I am no longer interested in that scornful maiden," he asserted; "tell me more of thy religion."

"Not now," was the answer; "think on what thou hast heard already."

"But that sign?"

"Of the Cross?"

"Nay, of the fish."

"Knowest thou the Greek word?"

"'Ιχθύς."

"Exactly. It signifieth Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. In Greek the words are Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ. Take the beginning letter of each word and combine them. Dost understand?"

"I understand," answered the tribune, a little look of awe in his mobile face.

CHAPTER XXIV

BREAKING THE BREAD

THE next tour of duty at the apartment in the insula for Caius Attilius began on the last day of the week as the Hebrew counted it. In the three days intervening he had once more got in touch with old Regulus. The latter had rented a small but comfortable apartment in an exclusive and well-located insula patronised by bachelors of rank and substance. The return of the worthy knight had been a godsend to Attilius. Among all his acquaintances in Rome there was not one save Regulus who treated him with halfway decent consideration, except perhaps Petronius, who knew him but slightly and came in contact with him rarely. The rest took their cue from Nero and Tigellinus, and Attilius found if he was to preserve his peace of mind he must avoid them like a pestilence, so as not to give way to the temptation of wholesale murder upon these degenerate and disloyal followers of his sometime friend and benefactor, the Emperor.

The home of Regulus, therefore, was a refuge. The centurion was surprised to find Attilius in a better mood. He had thought, as he hastened back to Rome on purpose to be with his beloved young friend, that the tribune would by this time have been goaded into madness by the insults and mockeries that Regulus foresaw would inevitably be heaped upon him. It was

plainly the intention of Nero and Tigellinus to drive him either into open rebellion or suicide, and Regulus would not have been surprised to hear of either of these things. He was at a loss to account for the philosophical calm, almost equanimity of the tribune. It was incomprehensible, nor could Attilius very well explain it. It was part of the influence which had been exerted upon him by Paulus, and the tribune could not at that time discuss it even with his friend. He did, however, tell the old soldier with great bitterness of the complete severance of all his relations with Gwenna, whereat Regulus was very sorry; but believing that it would only be temporary, did not bother his head much with the matter.

Regulus, of course, was busy a good deal of the time. He was a man of some property, and Attilius was often left alone in the pleasant little apartment which he frequented every moment he was off duty and free. The young man, however, had plenty with which to occupy his thoughts. He was in good condition for high thinking, also, for except for thought there was little in which he could indulge himself in that crisis in his fortunes. Of course, all his cogitations were not upon the subject of Paulus and his religion. A good many of them, perhaps more than half, were upon British Gwenna, who typified for him all that was selfish, forgetful, and ungrateful in womankind.

If the relative positions of these two had remained unchanged and Attilius had not been bound by class ideas and prejudices, or his promise to Paulus, he might have taken her, even by marrying her, and have become

tired of her. But since she was now free and had apparently definitely rejected him, her mere unattainability made her the more desirable. The tribune was a just man. He estimated himself not at his old value but at his new. Everything he possessed had been given up either to the prefect or to the Emperor, and Attilius had nothing but his meagre pay as a soldier. There were ways by which the pretorians increased their stipends, but to these petty and vicious practices Attilius could not stoop. Furthermore, the tribune had been compelled to enlist for a term of ten years, and for that period he was not free to take a wife even if he could acquire means to support her.

And the status of Gwenna had changed as greatly as his own. In her own country and among her own people she was as well born as he. Now that she was free opportunity might arise for her return to Britain, and as the war there was practically over and the country pacified, she could undoubtedly obtain some of her patrimony again. The Romans themselves, upon proper representation, would put her in possession of whatever could be secured. She was therefore in very different circumstances. She could go and come where she would presently. He did not doubt that the hunt for her would soon cease and that Nero would forget her. It would be safe after a time for her to leave Rome and go back to Britain. Paulus, who seemed to have a certain command of money and some influence, would provide the means, doubtless. Meanwhile he, Attilius, would have to stay where he was in his galling military servitude.

Of course, Gwenna had no proprietary rights in Caius Attilius, but aside from that there had been a complete reversal in the positions of the two. She was, in effect, mistress; he, slave.

And Gwenna's treatment of him had been most unkind, he felt; not at all what his treatment of her had been! Well, he determined to look at things philosophically and to dismiss the woman from his thoughts. He was not for marrying or giving in marriage, anyway. But that was easier said than done. And despite his resolution, he was most unhappy.

In these his troubles he found a strange consolation in that new religion. As a preliminary to a complete understanding of it, he conceived a vast respect for that Christus as he learned more of Him. In general, to submit to wrong or injustice without even a protest or semblance of resistance appeared cowardly to that Roman, but there was, nevertheless, something in the method of that submission which moved him profoundly. The man who could say the things that Paulus repeated to the tribune while He was being nailed to the cross and on the cross itself was certainly not a coward. Attilius had not yet heard the completion of the story of the Passion. He used to wonder how this man so degraded had become so exalted. He had heard whispers of the Resurrection, but this he dismissed as of little moment.

Finally he tried to tell Regulus something of what he had heard from Paulus. The old centurion listened attentively, but lacking the finer feelings of the younger man, he could see nothing praiseworthy or especially

commendable in that unresisting death. To fight always, and to die fighting if need be, was the creed of the centurion, and he could not easily in his mind enter into any battle in which the issues were merely moral and in which the courage displayed was of that order only. Regulus could not see much beyond the length of his sword, though he could see that far with great clarity and comprehension. The only impression that this new religion made upon him was that it did in some strange way seem to encourage and comfort the young tribune to whom he was so devoted, and for that he was thankful, although he passed the rest of it by, deeming Paulus a philosopher and a dreamer, and in neither capacity esteeming him greatly.

Regulus was often at court, and he used every reasonable means to commend himself to Nero and to ingratiate himself further with the prefect. He had a deep purpose in view. There was no one on earth for whom he greatly cared except Caius Attilius. He knew of the love of the tribune for the maiden, and as he was not born to the purple himself, the possible social objection to a union between them did not worry him greatly. And the difference that had arisen between these two who loved each other would soon be settled, he was sure. He wanted to make it possible that Attilius should eventually be discharged from the Pretorian Guard, be permitted to marry Gwenna, and go where he would. And to that end he left no stone unturned which his blunt diplomacy could compass. Nero liked him in a way and so did Tigellinus. For one thing, Regulus never asked any favours or gifts of any

sort, and that endeared him to the brutal prefect and no less to the greedy Emperor.

Whenever Caius Attilius was mentioned at court the centurion either said nothing or disguised his feelings, allowing the general censure and mockery to pass unchallenged, although often his blood burned and his hand unconsciously fell to his right side, where his short sword had hung for so many years. He realised that it would be fatal to his hopes and plans if any one suspected that he still cherished the tribune, and for that reason Caius Attilius was very circumspect in his visits to Regulus, coming and going before daybreak, or after nightfall, or otherwise shrouded in his military cloak, to escape recognition.

Caius Attilius was very glad for the next tour of duty. Paulus was very busy that Saturday. He was writing another epistle and he had a constant succession of visitors. The tribune felt that part of this present letter, which was addressed to the Christians at Ephesus and to the churches of Asia, was suggested by his presence when he heard Paulus, after looking hard at him in his war panoply, say near the close of the epistle:

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet

of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

A strange use for the arms and equipment of a Roman soldier, a pretorian of the guard, thought the highly interested and somehow strangely pleased young patrician.

The soldier had very few opportunities to converse privately with Paulus, but he was an attentive observer of all that happened, and as the visitors came on business connected with the infant church and as the discussion was invariably upon the new religion, the day was not ill spent. And as the sunshine sometimes breaks through the clouds on a dark, lowering morning, the tribune caught several passing glimpses of Gwenna. The girl had smiled pleasantly with just a touch of deprecation at his frowning face, and the action had brought him strange comfort, though he stubbornly made no return in kind.

He saw her in a new rôle that busy day, for her kindness and consideration to the women and children who made up part of the infant church and who came with the men to visit Paulus, amazed Attilius. He had known her haughty, fiery, impulsive, with a high temper not under very good control and disdaining

work. He now saw her gentle, tender, considerate, thoughtful, busy all the time in helping some one. What had transformed her? Was it Paulus? Or Christus? Sometimes she took the little children from their mothers into the inner apartment, whither he had no access, and he caught the ring of her laughter within, and the sound was sweet to him.

Why could she not have treated him with some of this pleasant courtesy and gentle humour? Why could she not have displayed some consideration for him? It was cruel and ruthless for him to have spurned the prostrate apostle in his weakness and misery. The tribune had manfully confessed his action to Paulus and had been freely forgiven. Why could not Gwenna have made some allowances for him? Well, she reserved all her sweetness for Paulus and his friends. Attilius could get along without it. And so he surveyed her with haughty indifference, and to her rather piteous looks, when she caught his eye again, he paid no attention.

Late in the afternoon, Cletus, one of the ministers, or elders, of the congregation brought to Paulus a young woman and her child.

"This is my daughter Julia," said Cletus, "this her babe, my grandchild. I know that thou dost not usually baptise, leaving that to us, but wilt thou in this instance?"

"Gladly," answered Paulus, smiling at the mother and the child she extended toward him. "When he groweth up to be a good man and a true like his grandfather, he may perhaps think with pleasure of this humble minister who made him a member of Christ, a

child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven. Gwenna," he continued as the British girl made her appearance in the doorway with one of the women who was about to leave for her own poor house, "wilt thou and Cletus witness this sacrament and stand sponsors for this child?"

"Gladly," was the prompt answer.

"Fetch hither, then, the bowl of silver from the chest yonder. Fill it with water and place it upon the tripod. Draw near, I pray thee, Attilius, and stand there, lest the chain strike the babe; and thou here, Gwenna, and thou, Cletus, yonder. Now, my daughter, give me thy son."

Attilius was profoundly interested in the ceremony which followed. He heard the words of the prayer, he noted the blessing of the water, he marked the cry of the child when Paulus, naming the boy, lifted the bowl and poured a part of its contents over the head of the little soldier and servant of Christ with the mystic words of the service and the accompanying ever-clinking chain. When all was over, Paulus returned the child to its grateful mother and handed the bowl to Gwenna, bidding her pour the remaining water upon some plants which grew in boxes on ledges outside of the windows.

"Some day," whispered Gwenna to Attilius, summoning her courage to address him despite the rebuffs she had sustained, "I shall see Paulus baptise thee as he hath baptised me."

And as usual, being taken by surprise by the suddenness of this whisper, Attilius could only stare in silence.

Indeed, he had no time to answer, for she had scarcely spoken the words before she was out of reach and hearing. But the thought sank in, the suggestion was not without weight. To be perfectly just it flashed into the mind of Attilius that such a ceremony might bring him nearer to Gwenna; he would not have been human had he not thought of that; and yet as he knew himself to be an honourable man, as he realised the earnestness and sincerity of Paulus, and as he had begun to get some idea of the religion, he knew that he could not be guilty of seeking the sacrament for such a motive. He must be convinced, or not even to win Gwenna could he offer himself in that way. And this was a great advance. Caius Attilius three months before, on the principle that anything was fair in love and war, which was truly a Roman maxim, would not have hesitated to profess anything for the woman.

Paulus and the tribune sat together late into the night, talking not of Gwenna, but once more of that Christus, and for the first time the Roman heard the great facts of the Resurrection. The Hebrew stopped short again of his own vision. There must be something left for future occasion.

The next morning the apostle rose just as day was breaking. Attilius' duty did not permit him to sleep, and he had kept his charge over the Hebrew immersed in thought. Paulus immediately summoned his household. There were several persons beside Gwenna in his service and the large room was readily arranged for the worship that was to take place at dawn of day. A table, larger and higher than that at which Paulus

wrote, was moved to one end of the apartment and covered with a spotless white linen cloth. Upon it two lighted candles were placed and between them a plain wooden cross upon a pedestal. A cup and plate of silver, a flagon of wine, a little pitcher of water, and bread in sufficiency, all covered by a smaller, finer cloth of sheer white linen, were made ready.

While this was being done and after Paulus had taken his morning bath, Attilius considerately remaining without the curtain drawn around the bronze bath tub until the ablutions of the Hebrew had been completed, the room rapidly filled with men and women and larger children. There were perhaps forty of them, and as they had been selected from the most worthy of the Christians for this great honour by Linus, Cletus, and the other elders, Attilius surveyed them with much interest.

They were plain people, as a whole, and yet he recognised his Greek philosopher Eurotas, a military tribune whom he had known but slightly, a knight, and one or two clients of great families whom he thought he had seen in the Forum in attendance upon their patrons. The rest of them were freedmen, or slaves, easily distinguished by their dress. There were a sobriety, a dignity, and a sweetness in all their faces which it would not be easy to find on the faces of any similar number of people gathered at random from Roman society, high or low.

Paulus presently came forth from behind the curtain, this time arrayed in tunic and girdle and a sleeveless overgarment like a Roman pænula, all of spotless

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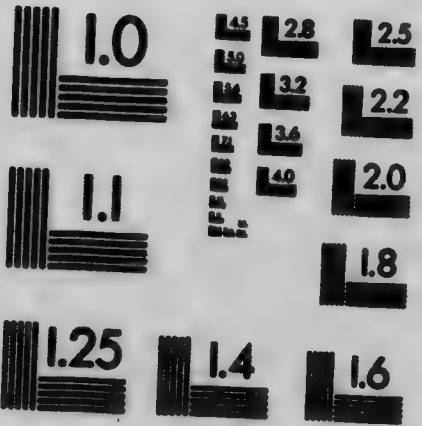

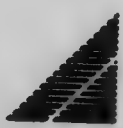

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white. Never had the holiness of the man been so apparent as it was then. Attilius, who usually laid aside most of his armour during his tour of duty, with some feeling that in this case he should do honour to whatever was toward by appearing in full dress, had donned his crested helmet, thrust his arm through his shield, buckled on his sword, and draped his cloak of purple, which he wore because he was of the imperial guard, across his broad shoulders.

As the two stood together they made a striking and impressive picture. Paulus was much the shorter man and his dress was simplicity itself, yet he presented quite as tremendous a figure as did the pretorian in purple and bronze and silver, the flickering candle-light reflected from every boss upon his cuirass or shield, and upon the shining hemisphere of his polished helm.

"I would," whispered the soldier to the saint, "that I could free thee from this chain for this hour."

"It mattereth not," said Paulus; "I am glad that thou art chained to me."

This was a new version of the connection and Attilius was sufficiently startled to hear it.

"What must I do to save thee from all possible trouble and annoyance?" he asked.

"Nothing. Stand thou there on that side of the table; the chain is long enough to give me freedom."

The two walked up to the table; Attilius took his designated position close by Paulus, so that the apostle would have freedom to move about the table and turn and administer the bread and wine to the kneeling

people. And the service began. The solemn prayer of access, the grave exhortations, the triumphant uplift, the tremendous words of consecration, the breaking of the bread and the passing of it and the cup to the kneeling figures, all made a deep impression upon the tribune. He saw the religion of Christ at its earliest, at its humblest, at its purest, and at its best. And the sight was good to him.

When all had communicated, Paulus was moved to preach to them. Attilius did not know, nor did any of those present except perhaps Linus and Lucas, who had assisted Paulus at the service, that what the apostle said he had before written in a letter to the Corinthians about the rising from the dead. There was a widow in the little group, a man who had lost his wife, another was an aged slave one of whose children had died under the lash. To them Paulus especially addressed himself, and Attilius also was in the mind of the great preacher as he talked to them of Jesus and the Resurrection. The silence was broken only by the stifled sobbing of the woman.

Paulus had seated himself while he spoke, and the congregation remained standing. As he sat down, Attilius moved and stood behind him, a glorious and splendid figure. The rising sun sent beams through the windows, which fell upon the white-vested apostle and the gorgeous soldier. The juxtaposition gave rise to strange reflections in the minds of the thoughtful who looked and listened.

When Paulus had concluded he rose to his feet and lifted his hands.

"Ye will kneel, beloved brethren," he said softly, "and receive my blessing?"

Every gesture that he had made, when he broke the bread, when he blessed the cup, when he had administered them, had been made to the clink of steel. The same chain clinked softly and wavered to and fro as he held up his chained hand. But a sharper sound was now heard above the rustling of garments as men and women and children knelt before the preacher. It was the clink and clatter of armour upon the floor of the room, the clash of shield against breastplate; for how or why he could not tell, yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, the soldier knelt with the rest for the benediction! Every one marked his action, most of all Gwenna, who, with wildly beating heart, knelt nearest of all others to the tribune and the saint.

Book V

THE APPEAL UNTO CÆSAR

CHAPTER XXV

HOW PAULUS SPOKE FOR HIMSELF

Paulus, as he had said, had long since had his primary hearing and then his formal trial before Sophonius Tigellinus and his colleague Fenius Rufus, a very different man, by the way, from the other pretorian prefect. Tigellinus would fain have put off his final hearing longer in the hope of making some financial gain out of the delay, but Paulus had insisted on his rights and his accusers had been forced to make out such a case against him as they could. The accusations had broken down and the prosecution had failed lamentably, as was a foregone conclusion.

In fact, Paulus had done nothing against the laws of the Empire. The weak case, as presented by the Jews, which taken in conjunction with the exonerating report of Claudius Lysias, military tribune at Jerusalem, in which report Antonius Felix, the former procurator, concurred; and the document of Porcius Festus, the present procurator, with a corresponding endorsement from Herod Agrippa, the King of Chalcis, left the pretorian prefects no option but to declare Paulus innocent of any crime and set him free.

Orders to that effect had been already made out, but their issue was delayed because Nero had heard about this Paulus from Lucius Annæus Gallio, brother of Seneca, who had come in contact with him in much

the same way as the other Romans when he was proconsul of Achaia, and also from an aged senator, one Sergius Paulus, who, while he was governor of Cyprus many years before, had also met the famous Hebrew. On this account the Emperor greatly desired to see and hear this somewhat notable prisoner, who, although a Hebrew, had with his case occupied the highest courts of the Empire for a long time and had more than once nearly precipitated riots in the ever-turbulent province of Jerusalem. Therefore, when the order of liberation was brought to the Emperor for his approval, he withheld his signature until he could see and examine Paulus himself.

Accordingly, about the kalends of March, some two years from the date of Paulus' arrival in Rome, the Emperor arranged a public hearing for the Hebrew. By public, it is not to be understood that the hearing took place in the Forum, where such matters were usually decided, but in Nero's palace, admittance to which was restricted to the friends of Cæsar, the officials of the Empire, and the women of the court. The previous trial had been public and had been held in the Forum, but as this was more in the nature of a hearing to gratify the curiosity of the Emperor, no attempt was made to admit any of those who did not have the right of entrance, or who were not especially selected by the Emperor.

Paulus was allowed to bring with him such of his friends as he chose, and although the risk was great, Gwenna had insisted upon accompanying him, together with Lucas, Linus, Cletus, and others of the Christian

church. As Paulus had not been technically freed he was still chained to the arm of his guard. It happened, by chance or providence, that the day for the hearing was the day on which Caius Attilius had charge of the prisoner.

Early in the morning a centurion with a company of pretorians arrived to escort the prisoner. No apprehension of the escape of Paulus was felt, but he was ordered to present himself before the Emperor, and it was well that he should go in state, the pretorian prefect had decided. The presence of the century did not, however, relieve Attilius of his guard duty.

Carrying the slack chain in his hands, he walked along by the side of the apostle in the centre of the square formed by the soldiers. Close at hand was Gwenna and with her Rebekah, together with Lucas, Linus, Cletus, and the others. The women had their heads covered and their faces veiled, a seemly use according to Paulus, and in the case of Gwenna a very desirable precaution.

Paulus knew that he was practically free and all that was required of him now was to present his case to the Emperor and secure a confirmation of the decree. But Paulus was not thinking of himself at that moment; he did not greatly care whether he was freed or not. He did not intend to justify himself to any great extent. He was firmly purposed to take advantage of what seemed the direct intervention of Divine Providence, to preach his Christ before Nero and the great nobles and people of the Empire. He had preached that Gospel before high Roman officials from proconsuls downwards,

before the learned philosophers of Athens, before the pleasure-loving sybarites of Ephesus, before kings of his own ancient people, but now he was to declare the Gospel of the Lord of the Universe to the lord of the world.

What he anticipated, what he expected, what he hoped from such a presentation mattered little. The business of Paulus was to preach that Gospel, and when he had done that the results were not in his hands. He had seen the power of that Gospel in the course of his thirty years of declaring it and knew there was no heart so stubborn, no soul so crime-stained but could be touched by it. It was such power as the world had never known. It was founded upon truth; he knew that the truth was mighty and would ultimately prevail.

With his thoughts turned inward, pondering the best method of presentation, the old apostle trudged along the narrow Roman streets. He was in a mood high and exalted, naturally resulting in great nervous excitement which rendered him insensible to everything else. Once Caius Attilius would have felt the degradation and humiliation of his position, stalking through the streets by the side of the man to whom he was chained, more keenly than words could have expressed, but now he was as indifferent to the jeering laughter and mockery of the rabble to whom his downfall was well known, as if it had had no existence whatever.

Attilius was not yet a Christian. He found it difficult to give way to his inclinations, to his desires. He had fought with his convictions like a Roman and had fought hard, but he had become profoundly interested in

that strange religion and that splendid figure of Christus bulked larger and larger before his vision. Paulus himself, as he knew him better and better, disclosed such high qualities of splendid manhood in the following of the Crucified, that the young tribune had almost reached the point of taking what he felt would be the last step which would cut him off from his past.

Conscious of his own integrity and conscious of the greatness of his prisoner, Caius Attilius was so far weaned away from that past as to be actually proud of the chain that bound him to the apostle. And the fact that he walked by the side of one who, although he was a poor, persecuted Hebrew in spite of his Roman citizenship, a prisoner of Rome, and an outcast from his own nation, unwelcome by any other, was indeed the greatest man that ever set foot within the narrow streets of the city fatuously called eternal, filled him with something of the elation of a conqueror; and this progress was to him not unlike the formal triumph of a victorious general on his way to the Capital.

Indeed, although Caius Attilius did not know it, Paulus was a conqueror, and this was the greatest of all the triumphs Rome had ever witnessed. The city might pass away, some day would pass away, but the words of that Christus as recorded by Lucas and as explained by Paulus would never pass. When even heaven and earth had gone, these would abide!

And Attilius was the more happy in that Gwenna was close by his side. Their last sweet hour of converse upon that Sunday afternoon after the Breaking of Bread had brought balm to his soul. He had been fear-

ful that her presence at the trial would be discovered and that she would fall into the clutches of Nero. He had urged that she change her design, but he had long ago discovered the persistence and determination of the girl. She was confident that her disguise would prove effectual, she promised to keep in the background. Nero was very near-sighted, Tigellinus would not recognise her with her dyed hair and skin and her strange Jewish dress, even if he saw her. Whatever the risk, she was determined to take it. The shifting movement of the little group of marchers brought her upon the other side of the tribune from Paulus. Those within the square were forced to walk close together by the narrowness of the streets and the number of soldiers. The soft draperies that enshrouded Gwenna's graceful figure brushed lightly against the sturdy person of the soldier and every touch brought him a thrill of joy.

He had loved her before, but something new, something higher, something nobler had come into his soul; his passion was not less, on the contrary greater, but it was finer. No one could be long in the presence of Paulus without feeling happier and better. Attilius noticed that even the rough soldiers, who like him were detailed in attendance upon the prisoner, were in some measure changed by the daily contact. One of them, at least, had become secretly an avowed Christian. With him, in their hours off duty in the camp, Attilius had often discussed the matter. The man was a plain, blunt soldier, but a man of character and worth, as the tribune soon discovered.

The journey from the insula in which Paulus had

lived to the palace on the Palatine was not a very long one; the distance was soon traversed. They were expected. The great gates in the outer walls were thrown open, the sentries on duty presented arms while the prisoner and his escort marched steadily across the courtyard through the garden and into the great hall of the palace.

Save for a few soldiers posted at convenient places, this great hall was empty. A low dais rose at the background on which were placed two chairs of carved ivory. Above these chairs a canopy of royal purple silk was draped. In the middle of the apartment a fountain played. The water shot almost as high as the ceiling and fell back with a musical plash into the marble basin. There was a large square aperture in the roof, and as the season was the spring of the year and as it was early in the morning, it was left open; the purple awning which usually covered it was not drawn, so that the great room was filled with bright sunlight. The walls were wainscoted with rare marbles and divided above into panels by pillars and columns sunk into the plaster. Between these panels the blank spaces were filled with mural paintings by the most famous artists of the time. Here and there in the niches of the wall were placed statues by the great masters of antiquity set on exquisitely proportioned pedestals. On either side of the dais, which was placed close against the further wall of the room, a number of chairs and couches were arranged for the use of the highest and oldest among the guests. The room was otherwise devoid of furniture.

The trampling feet of the prisoner and his attendants and the soldiers upon the tessellated pavement filled the empty place with sound. The centurion led his command to the centre of the room and stopped before the fountain. A few sharp words of command and the ranks opened and the soldiers fell into a double line which extended across the hall. The prisoner and his friends, with Attilius and the centurion, were left standing in front of the centre of the line.

This arrangement had scarcely been completed when the doors were opened at the further end of the hall, the heavy hangings of purple were drawn aside, and through them streamed a multitude of people. There were the two prefects in full armour of silver and gold, blazing with jewels. No conqueror returning home after the greatest victory shone like these two, whose soldiering of late had consisted merely in commanding the turbulent pretorians who formed the bodyguard of the Emperor. After them followed a number of dignified and venerable men whose senatorial rank was indicated by the broad purple stripe down the front of their tunics showing beneath their spotless togas. Among them were Seneca, Gallio, and Sergius Paulus. With these senators were a number of proud Roman matrons. After these came the equites, or knights, distinguished by their narrower double purple stripes, and with these, having edged his way to the front of the ranks, was Regulus.

A look of great anxiety was on his face—for Attilius, not for Paulus. Attilius was somewhat amused at the awkward way in which Regulus wore his toga. The

man was evidently much more used to the breastplate and helm and other accoutrements of war than with the garments of peace.

After the knights, who were also accompanied by the women of their station, came the Emperor's freedmen, led by Pallas, the richest man in Rome. They were mostly habited in tunics of the rarest and most costly materials, although some few of them, whom Nero had thrust into the Senate, wore togas. The background was filled with attendants and slaves.

A buzz of conversation rose as the various parties took their places, the senators and women, many of the knights, and some few of the freedmen being seated, the others standing. At the same time the doors through which the prisoner had entered were opened and the space back of the soldiers was also filled with minor officials, favoured slaves, soldiers of the guard, off duty temporarily, and other habitués of the palace who enjoyed the privilege.

When all had secured their places as indicated by the ushers who were charged with the duty of regulating the order of precedence, a fanfare of trumpets was blown and the nomenclator in his stentorian voice bade the company make way for the Chief of the State, the high, the mighty, the most excellent, Lucius Domitius Nero Claudius Cæsar, Imperator, Pontifex Maximus, with the noble and beautiful Augusta, the lady Poppæa, his wife. Those who had been seated rose and those who had been standing came to attention. All eyes were turned toward the doorway. Those on that side parted,

conversation ceased. The soldiers brought their weapons to the fore in salute.

As Nero was again consul he was preceded by his twelve lictors. They in turn were followed by a squad of pretorians. These opened ranks, and through the passageway came the Emperor. He was clad as usual in his favourite purple tunic, although in honour of the company he had the grace this time to cincture it tightly around his waist. He wore no toga, but his head was encircled by a fillet or diadem set with precious stones. He led by his hand on his left side the Augusta, the Empress Poppæa, who was reputed with desert to be the most beautiful woman in Rome. She was also one of the wickedest and most dissolute of Roman women, but from her baby face and innocent air no one would have suspected that. Her tunic and stola were of thin tissue of silver and gold, exquisitely embroidered, made in Coan, and scarcely veiling the figure they draped. She wore her diaphanous garments with shameless indifference. Her neck, arms, and ankles were blazing with jewels and on her head she wore a tiara of diamonds that sparkled like stars in the glory of her blond hair, unusual for a Roman woman.

A murmur of admiration broke from the multitude involuntarily, whereat Nero shot a swift glance around. He did not choose to be rivalled even by Poppæa, his consort. He lifted his emerald, but before he could place it to his eye the whole assemblage, recalling the proprieties, broke into a shout of greeting:

"Hail Cæsar! Hail divine Imperator! Hail lord of

the earth! Hail son of the gods! Hail Pontifex Maximus!"

Gwenna shot a swift glance at Caius Attilius as Poppæa entered. Like those of every one else, the tribune's eyes were fixed upon the royal pair, and a pang of jealousy went through the heart of the British maiden as she saw her lover stare at this other woman. If she had possessed the power of reading the mind of the tribune she would have had no cause for uneasiness, for Attilius saw that half the beauty of Poppæa was in her magnificent apparel and her jewels. He was saying to himself that Gwenna was doubly fair and more beautifully formed than the Empress, and the colour upon the cheek of his beloved barbarian was put there by nature and not by art. On every account Attilius was more than satisfied in the comparison.

Amid all these shouts and exclamations, Nero led Poppæa up the steps of the dais and motioned her to the lower seat, taking the higher one himself. He waited while the lictors arranged themselves about him and then turned to Tigellinus, who as senior pretorian prefect had approached and stood at the foot of the dais, facing the throne.

After Nero and Poppæa had come a few of the Emperor's choicest friends, Petronius, Senecio, Terpnos carrying the inevitable harp, Paris the dancer, Aliturus the actor, and one or two women in immediate attendance upon Poppæa, including, so the quick eye of Attilius soon discovered, Lollia Claudia, dark as midnight but radiant in a magnificent robe of crimson embroidered in gold and studded with diamonds. Her dress was

also of the thin sheer Coan weave and in its revelation and suggestion was even more daring than that of Poppæa, if possible. Around her neck was clasped a string of wondrous pearls. With a start Attilius recognised them as an heirloom in his family. He had purposed to give them to Lollia Claudia when he married her, but in the seizure of his household goods they had fallen to Nero and by him had been bestowed upon this beautiful but dissolute woman.

These few favoured of fortune arranged themselves on the dais back of Nero and Poppæa. The soldiers who brought up the rear also took their stand on the dais, so that save directly in front of him Nero was ringed about with steel. There was nothing to be apprehended from Paulus, but on an occasion of this kind, even though entrance was restricted to the chosen friends of the Emperor, Nero, who was a coward, a rare thing among the Romans, left nothing to chance.

Silence having been secured, Nero at last lifted his hand. Upon this signal, Tigellinus bowed low before him.

"Divinity," he began, "the prisoner Paulus, the Roman citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, having been tried before the prefects of thy Pretorian Guard, Fenius Rufus and thy devoted slave, by thine order, hath been found guiltless of any offence against Cæsar, the Roman Senate, the Roman people, or the Roman State."

The prefect stopped and nodded to a secretary, who with many bows came forward and handed him a paper. Receiving it, Tigellinus waved the man aside and

extended toward the Emperor an official parchment, heavy with seals.

"In accordance," he continued, "with the testimony of the tribune, Claudius Lysias, then stationed at Jerusalem, and of Antonius Felix, procurator, brother of Pallas, thy freedman, and of Porcius Festus, who succeeded Felix as thy representative in Judea, and that descendant of the Herods whom thou didst make of thy grace and clemency King of Chalcis, all declaring the innocence of this old man, we have made out a decree in thy name setting him free. It lacketh but thy signature, thy royal approval. Thou hast been pleased to grant the accused a public hearing. In accordance with thine order and direction it hath been arranged this morning. The prisoner is present."

"Hath he been searched," asked Nero, "to see that he carrieth no weapons?"

"Yes," answered Tigellinus, "he is an old man and is still in the custody of thy pretorians."

"Thou hast done well," said Nero. "We would fain hear this prisoner. Bid him approach our presence."

Tigellinus turned to the nomenclator. He would not demean himself by speech with such a man as Paulus, therefore he said to him:

"Summon the prisoner."

"Paulus of Tarsus in Cilicia, citizen of Rome, stand forth and answer to thine Emperor," cried the official in his great voice.

Now Paulus had been standing with closed eyes communing with God in prayer during the whole time. So rapt was he that first Gwenna and then the tribune

had to call his attention to the summons. When he perceived what they desired, he raised his head, straightened himself, squared his bent shoulders, and accompanied by Attilius, to whom he was still chained, and guided by one of the officers of the guard, who had stepped forward for the purpose, he walked around the fountain, advanced to the foot of the dais, and stopped before Nero.

"Divinity," said Tigellinus, waving his hand, "behold thy prisoner."

Nero lifted his emerald and peered through it at the apostle. As was proper, Caius Attilius stood a little in the rear and to one side of Paulus. The Emperor's eyeglass was turned after a while in his direction. He stared at him a moment, and then turned to Tigellinus, who had not removed from his place at the foot of the dais.

"Is not that——"

"A soldier of thine," interposed the prefect, "named Caius Attilius, in guard of the prisoner."

A light silvery laugh rose from the lips of one of those upon the dais back of Poppæa. It was Lollia who laughed. Nero frowned, looked around, observed who it was who had had the audacity to laugh, and then, appreciating what the laughter meant because he saw the colour flame into the face of the tribune, laughed himself, and the whole company, taking its cue from Cæsar, laughed loudly also.

The heart of Gwenna stood still. Beneath the stain upon her cheek the colour came. She wished in her soul that she had there a thousand of the sturdy bar-

barians who owed allegiance to her now that her father was dead. How she would have swept away that rabble from the Emperor down.

Attilius stood immovable like a statue of bronze. He marvelled that he was not more humiliated, but something sustained him before that degenerate audience and their mad jesting before a man who was being tried in one sense for his life. He glanced at the face of Paulus, who stood calm and unmoved, the pallor of his cheeks somewhat belied by the sparkle of those bright though near-sighted eyes. Paulus was sustained too. He was calm outwardly, easy, composed, bearing himself like the gentleman he was. It seemed that the same power that uplifted Paulus helped Attilius also, but the tribune did not know, he could not tell.

Presently the laughter died away. Nero beckoned to Tigellinus. The latter stepped forward and took his place on the dais.

"Stand thou here by my side," whispered the Emperor, "with thy sword out. I like not that Attilius."

"The gods will protect their favourite child," said Tigellinus softly, "but if not——" He lifted his shining blade as he spoke and then came to attention.

There was a bond of spirit and interest between Nero and Tigellinus. They had together sounded the depths of absolute depravity, and for that reason Nero, and with right, trusted everything to his dark minion.

Silence having again fallen over the audience, Nero stretched forth his hand toward the prisoner.

"Paulus of Tarsus," he said in his not unpleasant voice, "Roman citizen of Cilicia, we desire to hear thee

in thine own justification. I have been informed that thou art an advocate of those who worship that Christus who was crucified in thy country before I was born. I have here," he lifted the paper which Tigellinus had handed to him, "an order for thy release. If thou speakest well and dost please me, it shall be signed forthwith and thou shalt go free."

"Royal clemency," bellowed one of the lusty senators.

"Divine mercy," shouted a knight from the other side.

And then the crowd broke into an acclaim at which the Emperor was greatly gratified. He lifted his hand to still the tumult.

"Paulus, thou art permitted," he said at last, "to speak for thyself."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE INTERPOSITION OF GOD

In all that great assemblage none looked with more interest at the prisoner than Petronius. The arbiter was a singular mixture of refinement and vice, the noble and base, and his character was pervaded by a certain philosophy sometimes cynical, often profound, always in evidence. If he had listened to his good impulses Petronius might have written his name on the roll of the world's great, but a certain indifference, amounting almost to laziness, a *laissez faire* spirit which enjoyed the sweetness of doing nothing, at the same time reserving the right to mock, ridicule, and comment bitterly upon all that transpired, prevented him from being or doing anything. He was a Laodicean, a man who saw the evil of his time, despised it, yet tolerated it, even fell into it. He was the only man for whom Nero had the least respect, although that respect was mingled with fear which finally brought about the undoing of the Arbiter Elegantiarum.

Petronius was the friend of profound Seneca and sweet Gallio. The high-flown sentiment and magnificent philosophy of Nero's former tutor had often been discussed between the three. They agreed perfectly upon the beauty and propriety of Seneca's doctrines, but they had no impulse whatever to put them into play. Petronius saw the steady degeneration of

Rome going on, but like that "well-beloved" French monarch who came centuries later, he knew that his time was short and that he would outlast the Empire—for the rest and for what came after, that was no concern of his!

He had heard from Gallio, with whom Paulus had been thrown in contact at Corinth, something about the man. He looked at him standing at the foot of Nero's throne with intense interest. Somehow into the questioning mind of the arbiter came the thought that he on the throne and he at the foot of the throne represented two different systems, antagonistic, even antithetic, in character. One or the other could not persist on earth. That for which Nero stood, although it had the backing of the world—the Roman Empire!—and that for which Paulus stood, although he seemed now to have no backing at all, to the cynical pagan were at absolute odds.

Petronius was a mind reader. He was accustomed to estimate men, both at their surface value and otherwise, but primarily from what he saw without and then secondarily from his ability to look within. He thought Nero would have little chance with Paulus, either outwardly or inwardly considered. If Paulus had any backing at all Petronius was fain to confess that Nero and that for which he stood would be doomed. What, who, was behind Paulus? And that was something Petronius could not divine, could not suspect even.

There was no comparison between the two men. We have seen Nero. The splendour of his attire, the ad-

vantage of the position he enjoyed upon the dais, his beautiful hair with its bronze light encircled by the bediamonded fillet, did not in the least disguise the character that was stamped upon the face of the man. Pride of birth, pride f power, arrogance, insolence, encouraged by the thousand servile flatterers who surrounded him; moral evil, sexual vice, all were plainly written there. The man had no conscience, no soul, no affection. Poppæa, the beautiful if shameless wife, was to die hereafter from a brutal kick administered to her just as she was about to become a mother.

The Emperor had gained his crown through the murder of his step-father. He had shaken off the sway of his incestuous mother by matricide. He had poisoned the Prince Britannicus, his brother-in-law, the rival claimant for the throne. He had seduced and then married Poppæa, the wife of his dearest friend, whom he had sent into banishment, after the murder of his step-sister and first wife Octavia. Not one of the sycophantic, grovelling senators or knights, not even the intimate friends of Cæsar, not even Petronius himself had a certain tenure of life or property. Indeed, before his freedmen forced the dagger held in his own reluctant hands into the Emperor's throat, most of those who were present that morning had fallen victims of his resentment, his greed, and his fear. The bleary eyes, the pallid face, the pouting, sensual lips, the frowning brow, the ruthlessness and cruelty of his glance, would have marked the man as a criminal of the worst type, a degenerate of the lowest grade, in any society and at any time.

From that face with whose looks he was so familiar, the eyes of Petronius ranged to the prisoner. He saw a man small of stature but broad of shoulders and sturdily built, his back bent a little, as if by a burden too heavy to be sustained by a mere mortal. The man's face was pale, too, but there was a look of lofty purity in his countenance, a majesty in his face that might better have become a Cæsar; and such ineffable dignity, none the less evident from a certain humility in his bearing, that there was no comparison between the two. One, the man of the throne, was pale because of men and women and their vices; the other, he of the chain, was pale because of service for God. In but one particular, the two were alike. They were both near-sighted; but whereas Nero's eyes were dull and lifeless, those of Paulus were exceedingly brilliant.

The Hebrew lacked the glorious crown of hair of the Emperor; his massive head was bald except for a fringe of hair now almost white, his meeting eyebrows were iron-grey. Intellectual force and power were stamped upon that head as well as disinterested dignity and calm. The Emperor was clean-shaven; a short, carefully trimmed beard of "sable-silver" fell upon the prisoner's breast. Nero was vainly clad in the softest silk, Paulus wore the plain brown tunic of his habit. It was new, scrupulously clean, exquisitely simple.

Attilius towered over the apostle. In the open space left between the ordered ranks of the century which had brought the prisoner there and the crowded court on either side and back of Nero, the two striking figures were alone. The eyes of all were fastened upon Paulus,

some with interest, real or assumed, since Paulus was the object of Nero's attention; others with covert indifference, and some with open mockery and scorn. Back of the apostle, Lucas, Linus, Cletus, Gwenna, and the others prayed for him in that hour of trial. As Nero gave the Hebrew permission to speak, Paulus heard a whisper from his guard:

"Now may thy Christus be with thee!"

The words came to him softly, and although they came from the lips of a heathen, a man who had professed no belief, they gave Paulus wondrous encouragement. He was accustomed to being alone, so far as men were concerned, to standing solitary, sustained by the power of God only, before the world's courts; yet he was human and his heart thrilled to those words. He nodded imperceptibly to Attilius to show him that he understood and began his speech.

His voice was low. His words came slowly; he faltered from time to time. Those present thought that the greatness of his auditory oppressed him. But it was not that. Paulus was ever slow of speech and timid until he had entered fully into his argument, when his hesitation and timidity left him and he swung along like a tempest.

The Romans were great orators. To be taught to speak was part of the education of every patrician. Attilius had been charmed by Paulus' persuasive eloquence in conversation and he felt at once greatly disappointed. And there was a sense of personal regret, for without being conscious of it, he had, as it were, constituted himself the champion of Paulus, and he was very eager

that the Hebrew should set forth his case so as to move and appeal to Cæsar and the rest. He was disappointed, too, with the line of argument which Paulus seemed to be entering upon, after a few preliminary words. Instead of defending himself, he was actually preaching the Gospel of Christus to Nero!

But as the apostle progressed, as the words began to come quicker, as his voice steadied, as his hand uplifted, as his arms were thrown out in splendid gesture, the clink of the chain seeming to add emphasis to every movement, Attilius, like the rest, was carried away by the force and fire of his torrential eloquence.

"I count myself happy," he began, after a glance at Nero, but bending his eyes downward as he spoke, "at being permitted in this imperial presence to plead my cause. I have heard from the lips of his excellency, thy pretorian prefect, O Cæsar, that I have been adjudged innocent of any offence against Rome or its laws. The testimony of Claudius Lysias, of Antonius Felix, of Porcius Festus, and even of royal Agrippa of mine own nation, hath acquitted me. And perhaps it is not necessary for me further to discuss that wherewith I am charged save to confirm with mine own mouth the testimony that these have witnessed for me. I have committed nothing, not only against the laws of Rome but not even against the peoples or customs of my fathers. I have not shared in the tumults which raged about me. After successive trials before thine officers and after waiting two years in prison at Cæsarea, I appealed unto thee, confident that through the majesty

of Rome I should have that justice which I ask and which is my birthright as a Roman citizen."

"The man speaketh well," whispered Petronius from his place on the dais, which was raised only a step or two above the floor, to Regulus, who had edged close beside him.

A certain sympathy for Attilius had made these two friends who otherwise were so different in rank and station and culture that common interest between them was impossible.

"Well indeed," answered Regulus; "I know him; he is a man."

"That thou mayest have a proper understanding of all these things, O Cæsar," continued Paulus more easily and confidently, "know that I am a citizen of Rome, a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, no mean city, as thou hast heard. My family had earned Roman citizenship by service to the state. Into that citizenship, therefore, freely was I born. My father's labours brought him plenty for our needs. I was given the best education afforded by my native place, and as we Hebrews must all be taught a trade, I learned to be a tent-maker, and with these hands have I laboured to get mine own living and to be beholden to no one in after days. In my young manhood I was sent to Jerusalem and placed at the feet of Gamaliel, a great teacher of the Mosaic Law, where I was trained in the strictest way in the law of our fathers. It may ill beseem me to speak of myself, yet that thou mayest understand from the beginning, with thy gracious permission, I will speak on."

"Continue," said Nero.

His voice was not unpleasant, but how different did it sound from that of Paulus, which was gathering strength and sweetness and power with every passing moment.

"I thank thee. served the gods of my fathers with a pure conscience as I had a right, for I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, as touching the law a Pharisee. Thou hast heard of Christus, whom we call Jesus?"

"Aye," answered Nero. "He was crucified for sedition in the reign of my divine precursor Tiberius Claudius Cæsar, by one Pontius Pilate, who was then the imperial procurator of Judea."

"That is He," continued Paulus. "Men of my people worshipped him as God. These I persecuted even unto death, being exceedingly mad at them. The men were stoned, the women and the children delivered into prison, for I hated His Holy Name. My manner of life from my youth, which was at first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, and they could testify, if they would, that after the most straitest sect of their religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged by them for the hope of the promise of God made unto our fathers. The promise of a Messiah who would restore to God's chosen people their ancient rights and privileges, their ancient liberties."

"Is this treason?" interposed Nero harshly. "Have a care, Paulus; thy decree is not yet signed."

"Nay, Imperator," answered the apostle, "the kingdom of the Messiah is a spiritual kingdom. One day His enemies sought to entrap Him upon the question of paying tribute to the Emperor. He called for a piece of silver of the imperial coinage. He showed it to them, it bore the head of Tiberius, and asked them whose was its image and superscription. They answered Cæsar's. He handed it back to them with the injunction that they should render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's and unto God the things that were God's."

"This Christus was a philosopher," said Petronius softly into the ear of Nero. "Into His teachings we might profitably inquire, divinity."

Nero nodded, glad to have this word of approval from the arbiter.

"He was right," he said to Paulus. "Proceed."

"Our prophets foretold that our Christus would be rejected by His people, that they would crucify Him, that He would suffer for their sins, and that on the third day He would arise from the dead."

"And did He?" queried Nero.

"Thou sayest," answered Paulus solemnly, the bold confirmation ringing through the hall as he stood erect and looked straight into the face of the Emperor.

"And hast thou proof of this?" asked Nero carelessly, amid an excited buzz of incredulous exclamation and comment.

"I have."

"Thou dost interest me greatly," said the Emperor; "speak on."

"I did not read aright the ancient prophets. Crucifixion was of old to us the sign of the wrath of God. I believed the Man condemned by His own sins rather than by mine. I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

"Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O Cæsar, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' And I said, 'Who art thou, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. But arise and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee. Delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may

receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.'

"Whereupon, O Cæsar, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. But showed first unto them of Damascus and at Jerusalem and throughout all the coasts of Judea and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me.

"Having therefore obtained help of God I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. That Christ should suffer and that He should be the First that should rise from the dead and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles, for so in our speech we style all those who are not of our nation, meaning no disrespect thereby."

The voice of the great preacher coming into his own rang through the lofty hall, which had grown strangely silent. As he spoke of the beauty and the power of the radiant vision which had met him in the way, he threw his hand upward and stepped back a little, full into the sunlight which poured through the great opening in the ceiling. And following that upward gesture it almost seemed for the moment as if the Christ he preached were there.

As he paused after that great climax to begin again in a lower key, a sudden murmur broke out again. How would these words be received? It was soon determined. Nero, of all present the least moved, smiled.

There was mockery in that smile. Tigellinus, quick to interpret his master's moods, burst into loud, vulgar, jeering laughter.

"Paulus," cried the prefect, recovering himself with difficulty, "thou art beside thyself. Much learning hath made thee mad."

Tigellinus laughed loudly again and the whole hall was swept by a gale of merriment. Did Nero and his think they could laugh down the wind Paulus and his Christ? Who shall say? Such a reception would have daunted the boldest man. He was truly alone before the mocking world and its rulers, but the fire had entered the soul of that Hebrew. Their laughter moved him to pity, to pity for them. He raised his hand once more and opened his lips.

The tumult died away. This was a rare meeting. They were getting much amusement out of it. Nero had been well advised to provide this spectacle for his court. What further folly at which they might jest would this strange Hebrew speak? Would he be indifferent or resentful? Some of the sharper eyes had seen Attilius clench his sword at their mockery and that added much to their pleasure. What would Paulus do? Gently, sweetly he began:

"I am not mad, most noble prefect, but speak forth words of truth and soberness. If thou wilt but hear me further, O Cæsar."

"And dost thou think," laughed Nero sneeringly, "to persuade me in a little to be a follower of thy crucified God—a Christian?"

"I would to God," cried Paulus, lifting up his chained hand and shaking it in the face of them all, "that not only thou, O Cæsar, but also all that hear me this day were, both in little and in great, such as I am, save for these bonds."

"Insolence!" cried Tigellinus, stepping forward.

"Nay," said Nero, "it amuseth me, and yet there is some method in his speech. What saidst thou of thy Christ, Paulus? Whose Son was He?"

"The Son of God, born of His Holy Spirit of a virgin mother."

"Impossible," exclaimed Pollio scornfully. "In the fables of our discarded religion there were many gods born of women—scarcely virgin!—and of Jupiter; but none believe in that religion now, save the common people."

"'All religions,'" quoted Petronius, "'are regarded by the common people as equally true, by the philosophers as equally false, and by the statesmen as equally useful.'"

"I do not find that statement of a man being fathered by a divinity so impossible of belief," said Nero, touched in his self-esteem, "for I myself am born of a god."

"But not by a virgin if Agrippina be his mother," Petronius could not resist the temptation to whisper to Regulus, taking his life in his hands as he did so, for had Nero heard him or any one else save so faithful a man as the centurion that hour had been his last.

"True, O divinity," cried Pollio, alarmed at the

tangle into which he had thrust himself in his impetuosity.

"Blasphemer!" cried Paulus furiously, his pale face reddening; "Antichrist!"

Nero turned and looked at the prisoner, his own countenance flushing in turn with anger at the interruption, and Paulus sustained that look, which caused even the great among the Romans to cower, without blenching.

"Thou seest, Pollio," loudly exclaimed Petronius, quick to intervene to save the Hebrew, who had interested him and whose courage he admired, "even Paulus hath found thee at fault because thou hast forgotten the divinity of Cæsar."

"As ever thou art right, my Petronius," said Nero, his face clearing at the explanation; "and now tell me, Paulus, am I not a greater god than this Christus, since I have not been crucified?"

He rose as he spoke and looked around him with insolent pride. The whole assemblage rose with him and shouted and cheered him, while above the tumult rose the steady cry from hundreds of throats:

"Divinity! divinity! divinity!"

"And this," whispered Petronius to Regulus, with biting irony, "is the way we make our gods."

Horror-stricken, Paulus stood rooted to the spot, his eyes fixed on Nero, his hands outstretched, his body bent backward, his head turned sideways as if he expected a shock. So the Philistines might have stood that moment when they saw the temple begin to fall under Samson's mighty out-thrust arms. There was something so tremendous, so terrific in his figure

"That divinity that thou hast claimed, oh Nero"

that as one after another saw him the shouts died away and silence prevailed as suddenly as the tumult had arisen. This was the Hebrew's opportunity.

"For Christ's sake, in Whom I now believe," whispered Attilius to him, catching him by the arm, and the apostle had time to note that confession, "say no more."

The Roman divined that Paulus would not permit such blasphemy as had fallen from the lips of Nero to pass unrebuked.

Attilius had seized him with a grasp of iron, but Paulus shook him off as if he had been nothing. He stepped forward.

"That divinity that thou hast claimed, O Nero," he thundered, raising his hand——

And then something happened. The voice of the speaker died away, his mouth opened, a strained, awful look came into his face, his arm fell. A horrible, guttural sound broke from his lips that had a moment since framed such magnificent words. His jaw locked, a fleck of foam fell upon his beard. He swayed and staggered, and before Attilius could catch him he crashed down upon the pavement, writhing and struggling in the grasp of a frightful convulsion.

It seemed to Attilius, as he fell to his knees and seized the apostle, that God had indeed avenged the blasphemy, *but upon the wrong man!* Yet, as always, had he but known it, God was right.

There was a rush of feet across the pavement. Nero, seeing the figures approaching him and shocked beyond measure by the dreadful spectacle presented, shouted

in great alarm for Tigellinus and the guard. They placed themselves in front of him with drawn swords, but there was no need. The approaching figures were those of Gwenna and the other women and Lucas, followed by the rest of the Christians.

Gwenna took the head of the apostle in her arms, Lucas knelt by his side. Linus and Cletus aided the soldier to control the fearful convulsive movements of his limbs.

"It seemeth to me," whispered old Regulus to Petronius, voicing the thought of Attilius, "that the gods, if such there be, have made a mistake in launching their wrath upon Paulus rather than upon Nero."

"Forget that thou hast uttered those words," said Petronius.

Meanwhile over the assemblage broke a shout of horror. Women screamed, some covered their faces with their hands, others leaned forward fascinated.

"He hath the comitial disease," cried Senecio, and the cry was taken up. "The wrath of the gods is upon him."

"Will he die?" asked Nero, trembling.

"Is there a physician here?" cried Tigellinus.

"I," said Lucas, rising to his feet, "am a physician and a friend of Paulus. He will not die. Since his conversion these attacks have come upon him in great moments like these, and——"

"Let him be taken away," said Nero.

"As a prisoner?" asked Tigellinus.

"Nay, let him go free. Stay," he continued as Tigellinus presented the parchment for the Emperor's

signature, "what said he before he was stricken down?"

"The last words that fell from his lips were addressed to thee," interposed Petronius swiftly, giving the slower Tigellinus no time to reply; "he spoke of thy divinity."

"And for that did he incur the wrath of the gods?" asked Nero dubiously.

"Nay, but because he had sought to make his own god greater than thou wert," answered Petronius, who had no scruples whatever and was determined to secure the enlargement of Paulus at any cost.

The arbiter was no Christian and had no intention of becoming one. What he had in mind was the helping of the prisoner whom in some way he found to be mixed up in the fortunes of Caius Attilius, for whose disgrace and misfortunes Petronius was profoundly sorry.

"Again thou art right," said Nero, greatly relieved apparently. "The man shall be released. He is mad but harmless. Give me the order and a pen."

Tigellinus nodded to the secretary, who came forward again. Nero sat down, rested the parchment on his knee, dipped the reed in the ink, and scrawled his name at the bottom of it.

"If he liveth," he said, "he shall be free."

He handed the parchment to Tigellinus, who in turn passed it to Lucas. But the venerable Greek felt that he could not pass by Nero's blasphemous words any more than Paulus, nor was he willing to allow the suggestion of Petronius to pass unchallenged. He stepped forward and lifted his hand toward Cæsar.

"What wouldst thou?"

"Speech with thee," cried Lucas bravely.

"And I, and I," cried Linus and Cletus in turn.

"I have heard enough this morning," said Nero indifferently; "if ye have a petition to present, or other matter to bring before me, let it follow in due course. Take the old man away. The audience is over."

He rose again as he spoke, and the room resounded with the calls of the soldiers on guard to attention and the clamorous hails of the assemblage, and although Lucas and the rest spoke now without permission, Nero had turned away, and Tigellinus, fiercely resentful, bade his soldiers clear the hall. Petronius lingered after the rest with Regulus. He stepped to the side of Attilius.

"My litter is outside," he said; "thou canst have it for the morning to take the old man to his home. Say to him that one Roman disbelieveth his story but admireth his courage. Farewell."

"I will go with you," said Regulus. "Tigellinus hath promised me an escort of pretorians."

"Let us go then," said Attilius; "the audience is over and Paulus is free."

CHAPTER XXVII

CAIUS ET CAIA—VALE

PAULUS being at last laid upon his bed in his apartment continued in that merciful oblivion which invariably succeeded his attacks. Lucas, who watched him assiduously, gave him a soothing, quieting draught when he stirred and was able to take it, and under its influence the tired old man slept soundly throughout the afternoon and night until the next morning. None had sought to disturb him throughout the long afternoon of the day of the trial. Lucas had begged that all save the inmates of the apartment withdraw, and among those who had gone away had been Caius Attilius, his mind a tumult of feelings and emotions too great for words.

The first thing that came to Paulus when he awakened was a sense of something missing. He could not at first make out what it was. Finally he lifted his left arm and stared at it. There was a broad white mark around the wrist, outward and visible sign of the fetter which had been clasped about it for the two long and weary years, but the black bracelet of steel over the woolen wristlet was gone. No clinking of the chain followed the movement of his arm; there was no drag, no weight upon it. What did it mean? Who had released him, and why?

Paulus sat up in bed and stared af the spot which

had been covered by that fetter. He studied over the problem for a long time. Finally he clapped his hands softly, and Lucas and Gwenna and Rebekah and the other inmates of the household came running.

"What hath chanced?" asked the apostle, stretching forth his arm for all to see. "The chain is gone! Where is my guard?"

"Thou art free," said Lucas.

"Free!"

"Aye, by Nero's order. Dost thou not recall the hearing and thy proclamation of the Gospel?"

"When was it and where?"

"Yesterday morning in the palace of the Cæsar."

Paulus bent his head into his hands, thinking deeply, and finally groaned aloud.

"I remember," he said slowly at last; "the blasphemer, the antichrist, whom I would fain have rebuked but—what stopped me?"

To this question none made answer, only Lucas his old friend looked at the apostle meaningly, his face working with love and tenderness.

"Was I stricken down?" asked Paulus in agony.

"The hand of God," answered Lucas softly.

"Yes, yes," admitted Paulus, "but——"

"In thy behalf and for the furtherance of the Gospel," urged the Greek earnestly.

"What meanest thou, beloved friend?"

"God hath still work for thee to do. Thy time in His hands is not yet. If thou hadst been permitted to speak on, thy headless body would even now be lying without the walls."

"His will be done," said Paulus humbly, striving for his wonted composure; "but, beloved Lucas, even thou dost not know—how I have prayed—I am weary of my course. I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith——"

"But thou must go on until the end."

"And now I am free?"

"Here is the edict," said Lucas, taking the roll from the writing table, "signed by Cæsar's own hand."

"The man of sin hath power over the servants of God!" said Paulus. "Well, we may not inquire too closely into God's ways."

"Beloved master," said Lucas, "never since I have been with thee hast thou borne such a splendid testimony to Christ, our Lord, as on yesterday morning before Cæsar and his court."

"Only to be stricken down in the end," said Paulus. "But thou, thou wert free——"

"Reproach me not," interrupted Lucas quickly; "with Cletus and Linus I stepped to the foot of Cæsar's throne, demanding to be heard, intending to say what thou wouldst have said, but he would not listen to us. He dismissed us with a wave of his hand, and although we shouted at him, the tumult in the hall drowned our words. Tigellinus drove us forth at the sword point."

"I knew that thou wert a true man and worthy follower of our Master, Lucas, and Linus and Cletus as well. Now we must get away from Rome at once."

"Thou wilt tarry a few days to recover thy strength?" asked Lucas.

"Nay, I go at once. I have tarried too long here in idleness."

"Whither goest thou?" asked Lucas. "Not that it mattereth, for I shall go with thee wherever it may be."

"Where we have often planned. To Lusitania, to the utmost bounds of the west, and perhaps"—his eye fell upon the form of Gwenna—"perhaps some day, who knoweth, to that far-off island of thine." He looked at her fixedly. "Wilt thou go with us?" he asked suddenly.

And Gwenna faltered.

"I—I do not know, beloved teacher," she said at last, "I——"

"Where is the young tribune?" asked Paulus. "He said something to me before I was stricken that gladdened my heart and I would fain hear it again."

"He left with the decurion when the chain was stricken off yesterday. He would have been back in the afternoon but that Lucas forbade him," answered Gwenna.

"Lucas," said Paulus, smiling, "thou shouldst have been more thoughtful of youth and love. Let him be sent for. This Caius Attilius——"

"Dost thou desire to see me, venerable Paulus?" said the deep voice of the tribune from the front of the room near the door which he had just entered unobserved.

"Wilt thou draw the curtain, beloved Lucas, and help me to the bath yonder? I must arise. I have much to do," said Paulus. "And thou, Caius Attilius,

wilt remain with Gwenna until I have speech with thee?"

"I am free for the day," answered the soldier, "and my pleasure is thine."

"And, Rebekah, wilt thou make ready that with which we may break our fast speedily?" said the apostle, waving his hand in dismissal.

All the others accordingly retired except Attilius and Gwenna, who walked away to the window. Lucas drew the concealing curtain and led the apostle toward the bathroom containing the bronze bathtub, into which the pure water from the hills was soon running through the taps.

"What was it," asked Gwenna, "that Paulus heard thee say?"

"I am a Christian," answered Attilius firmly; "what the Hebrew said at the audience convinced me at last."

"God be praised; and thou wilt be baptised?" cried Gwenna, her face alight.

"If Paulus thinketh me worthy," answered Attilius, smiling, yet in sadness, at her.

And here the maiden did a strange thing. She fell on her knees before him.

"Lord," she said, clasping his hand and kissing it.

"What is it?" asked Attilius wonderingly.

"I was thy slave before and I am thy slave still."

"Not at my feet, dearest maiden, but in my arms," said the Roman, lifting her up.

He had often clasped her in his arms before, always against her will and by force, save on the night of the feast, and he had even ravished her lips of kisses; but

this time it was different. She gave herself up to his embrace gladly, not turning away when his lips sought her own. Her arm stole around his neck and between kisses they whispered to each other words that can be but once uttered and when once heard can never be forgot.

"And thou wilt marry me now, my lord?" asked the woman; "I shall be thy true and honoured wife?"

"Thou dost forget," answered the tribune bitterly, "that I am a soldier bound for ten years, that I am penniless, that thou art free—rich—a princess of Britain."

"I forget everything," answered Gwenna simply, "except that I am thine, and be the years long or short I shall wait for thee."

"Whither goeth Paulus?" asked the tribune suddenly, still holding her close.

"To Lusitania by sea and perhaps to mine own dear island of Britain."

"And when?"

"To-day, if he can get a ship."

"And thou wilt go with him?"

"Not without thee."

"But what canst thou do here in Rome alone?"

"I know not, but I cannot leave thee."

"Where wilt thou stay?"

"Not even that do I know, but I shall stay, for thou art here."

"There is no one to whom I can entrust thee save perhaps Regulus, and he——" began Attilius thoughtfully.

There came the sound of heavy footsteps outside.

The door turned on its pivot and the broad, sturdily built veteran appeared in the entrance.

"How opportune is thine arrival, old friend," said the tribune, delighted, stepping forward, half leading, half carrying Gwenna with him in his arms.

He had been separated from her so long and fate bade fair to separate them so soon again that he would fain hold her close while he could, no matter who might see.

"And in what way can I serve thee, I who live to serve thee?" asked Regulus quickly.

And in their joy they did not notice a certain grim melancholy which overspread the features of the worthy centurion. He looked old and lonely, careworn and tired. But love and youth were blind to the world, and neither of the young people observed the sadness and quiet of the veteran.

"I am a Christian——" began Attilius.

Regulus nodded gravely; it was no news to him; he had expected the announcement.

"I had supposed so," he commented. "It is easy to understand. Go on."

"I have plighted my troth to Gwenna; she loveth me."

"Wilt thou marry her?"

"If she will do me so much honour."

"Thou art indeed changed," returned the centurion curiously. "Well, what preventeth thy nuptials?" he asked.

"My term of service as a pretorian of the guard. I am bound for ten years by my oath."

"Let that trouble thee no longer," said Regulus calmly.

"What meanest thou?"

The centurion took from his tunic an order.

"Here is thy discharge."

"And how didst thou secure it?" asked Attilius wonderingly.

"With—with the remainder of thy fortune. Foreseeing such a chance as this, I held back enough to bribe Tigellinus."

"And Nero?"

"Thou shalt be reported killed in a brawl in the city. Thou must leave Rome and disappear, of course."

"With me and Paulus, in the ship and to my island," cried Gwenna, radiant with joy.

"It is well thought on," said Regulus.

"Suffer me, worthy friend," said the maiden.

She disengaged herself from the close clasp of the tribune. She stepped over to the old centurion, slipped her arm about him.

"Thou hast been as a father to my lord and to me."

She bent his grizzled head and pressed her lips upon his brow. Regulus looked at her strangely.

"That is the first kiss I have had from lips like thine since I left my mother's knee," he said.

"And my blessing go with it, Regulus, worthy friend," said Attilius, seizing his hand. "I will not desecrate with my lips the face that Gwenna's lips have touched. Thou hast been more than a father to

me. Life, honour, the woman I love thou hast given to me. How can I requite thee?"

"In this recognition I find reward enough," answered the soldier, greatly embarrassed apparently.

"Come thou with us and old Paulus. I am a rich woman in mine own land," said Gwenna; "thou shalt have ease, comfort, a command in Britain."

"No," answered the veteran.

"And we will make thee a Christian," urged Attilius with all the zeal of a new convert.

But Regulus shook his head.

"I was born in Rome, I have fought always under her standard. I have worshipped always, in my rough old way, her gods. I can live nowhere else. I can fight in no other cause. I can learn no new religion in mine old age."

"What, Regulus!" exclaimed Paulus, entering the room, refreshed from his bath and dressed in his usual habit, although the keen eye of the centurion noticed the ravages of the recent attack, the results of which would be apparent for some days. "Thou art set in thy ways, old friend."

"It is even so, worthy Paulus. But I have a message for thee from the noble Petronius, whose ready wit diverted suspicion from thee when thou didst so boldly challenge Cæsar."

"I suppose that I should be grateful," said Paulus, "but I would to God that He had permitted me to finish my testimony."

"It seemeth to me that thy God struck down the

wrong man yesterday, and I said so to the arbiter, who agreed with me."

"Nay, nay," interposed the Hebrew; "whatever He doeth is right."

"I suppose He hath more work for thee to do?" shrewdly surmised the old soldier.

"That is the explanation of it, doubtless," admitted the apostle. "But what said the noble Petronius?"

"That one Roman disbelieveth thy story but admireth thy courage."

"My courage is not mine but His that sent me," returned Paulus. "Wilt thou thank the Roman for me? I shall pray for him that light may enlighten his darkness."

"I shall give him thy message; and now hail and farewell."

"Stay," said Paulus; "break bread with thy friends, if thou wilt so far honour my poor abode."

"Nay," said Regulus, "I must go. Wilt thou tell me of thy plans?"

"Thou hast well said that God when He struck me spared me for a purpose. I am for Lusitania by ship to-night, from Ostia to Puteoli, and thence across the seas aboard the first vessel that is ready. I would fain take Gwenna with me, but if she should elect to bide here longer on account of Attilius yonder, perhaps thou wilt take care of her."

"Attilius goeth with us, beloved Paulus," cried Gwenna eagerly. "Regulus hath secured his release from service. My lord is a Christian and seeketh baptism at thine hand, and after——"

"Afterward the blessing of God by thy lips upon our union," said Attilius.

"Thou saidst something to me that was burned upon my memory as I advanced to hurl his blasphemy into the face of Cæsar."

"That I was a Christian, and if I am found worthy I would be baptised into the Name."

"Praised be God for His mercy," said Paulus. "Regulus, wilt thou not come with us and know more of this our holy religion?"

"I have answered the invitation which the noble Attilius and the lady Gwenna have already extended. I am a Roman, born in the City of Rome; I have fought for her throughout my long life, worshipped her gods, false though they may be, I know not as to that. In that faith and service I must die—as I have lived."

"Thou art a man at all events," admiringly said Paulus, ungrudgingly giving him his hand; "I shall pray for thee."

"Here then again is thy discharge, beloved Attilius," said Regulus, lifting up the order and then drawing from out of his tunic a full purse, "and here is somewhat for thy present needs," he added. "Thou wilt not forget the old man alone, in thy joy together? The gods or thine own God have you both in keeping. Again—farewell."

He turned away and without another word disappeared through the doorway, not even seeing Paulus' hand uplifted in blessing, or Gwenna's outstretched arms. Nor did the centurion imagine that the eyes

of Attilius were moist with what, had he not been a Roman, might have been called tears.

And so he went out of their lives. So, too, later he gave up his own life. He had deceived the tribune. Nothing had been saved from the wreck of the fortunes of Attilius. It was by the complete sacrifice of all that he had amassed in his long years of service that Regulus had purchased the discharge of his friend. At the end of his life he found himself penniless, alone in the city that he had loved. He had nothing to expect from Nero, or the State that he had served, or the gods to whom he had sacrificed. He had been away too long to have acquired friends to whom in his extremity he could turn. The men sent by Tigellinus to take possession of his goods found him on the floor of his atrium before his lares and penates, the sword which he had drawn so often in the battles of the Empire buried in his own brave heart. He had nothing to live for, nothing to hope for. Those whom he had loved and served were gone. Death alone was his only portion. And yet his death was not unworthy of his Roman name and fame. Certainly he had loved much, and in that love he had surrendered all things without repining. *Ave atque vale!* Hail and farewell, soldier, as thou passest on.

Blissfully unconscious of this, Attilius and Gwenna stood in the after part of the little ship drifting down the Tiber with the current from Ostia and looked back upon the myriad lights of the city gleaming in the deepening twilight. Near by Paulus leaned against the bulwarks and stared at the outlines of the great build-

ings grouped on the seven hills fading fast away in the darkness.

There was a sadness in the hearts of the two men. Paulus because he thought he had accomplished so little, Attilius because he was an exile from his native land. Attilius was to see Rome no more. Paulus was to come back again to testify with his life to the truth that was in him—and before Nero a second time! The woman alone was happy, and yet after a while something of the sadness in the hearts of the two men she loved was communicated to her.

From where she nestled in Attilius' arms she reached out her hand toward Paulus, speaking not, yet tenderly sympathetic, in a way not to be misunderstood. The old man took the woman's hand and patted it softly. Presently he raised his hands over their heads and over the city beyond, his lips murmuring. He made the sign of the cross with his hand and turned away.

In the growing darkness Gwenna lifted her head and whispered something in her husband's ear. They were Christians, both, but it was an ancient heathen phrase, a marriage vow, hallowed by years of usage in Rome, which she had somehow learned, that Attilius heard:

"*Where thou, Caius, art,*" she said in glorious devotion and submission, "*there will I, Caia, be!*"

THE END

AN AFTERWORD OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND EXPLANATION

I AM deeply grateful to James Stewart-Smith for archeological data; and to Alsop Leffingwell, Louis E. Daniels, Frederic Taber Cooper, and Miss Charlotte Pendleton for reading the manuscript and making criticisms and suggestions, many of which I have embraced; yet I would not have the reader hold any of these friends responsible for anything that appears hereafter. For all faults I alone am to blame.

Among the minor perplexities which have required decision in the writing of this book, and about which a word of explanation may not be amiss, has been the necessity of deciding between the usage of "you" and "thou," etc. I know that the two forms are intermingled in some instances in the Bible and in the works of Shakespeare, but every critic who has read this book has protested against such mingling in its pages, perhaps because nice customs only courtesy to great kings, like the writers of Scripture and Shakespeare himself. I think if I had been a free agent in the matter I should have used the modern form in every instance, but as there are many quotations in which Paulus says what he said and wrote in his published works, it would have been, I think, unwise to change them into modern speech, and therefore, to be consistent and harmonious, I have used the ancient form in every instance.

C.T.B.